

Purbeck Local Plan Examination – Housing Matter E Issue 2 (Policy H2)

Wareham Neighbourhood Plan

1. Current Status of the Neighbourhood Plan (WNP)

The Wareham Neighbourhood Plan has completed its Regulation 16 Consultation and is currently at Examination stage.

On 10th September the Examiner issued a Procedural Note on the WNP. This essentially concerns two matters. The first concerns changes which the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group would like to make to the Plan. His advice is that there is no procedure in the Regulations for the Qualifying Body to make changes to a Neighbourhood Plan at this stage. Secondly, he is concerned because of the complex and conflicting advice he has received concerning mitigation measures requires to satisfy the Habitats Regulations Assessment. He advises therefore that the Plan should be withdrawn and resubmitted incorporating the changes sought. However, he is prepared to consider other options.

The changes suggested result from the WNP Habitats Regulations Assessment which required measures to mitigate the effects of new residential development proposed in the NP on internationally protected sites. The intention was to achieve this through provision of a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) to the west of Westminster Road, Wareham, and to evidence deliverability through a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) agreed between Welbeck Land, Dorset Council, Natural England and Wareham Town Council. However, after three months of discussions and exchange of draft statements with Welbeck Land, agreement could not be reached.

The Town Council therefore investigated other options for mitigation and on 2nd August agreed a Statement of Common Ground with Dorset Council, Natural England and Henry Scott of the Scott Estate owner of the Bog Lane SANG which has potential to accommodate mitigation for further development.

The Town Council is taking Advice on the procedural issues from Sasha White QC and is considering asking for the NP to be examined as submitted together with an addendum on the Habitats Regulations Assessment to cover the mitigation measures set out in the SoCG. It is expected that a Hearing will be necessary for the Examiner to take evidence on the issues. We are confident that the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and will progress to referendum. Consultation work undertaken to date indicates very strong public support for the proposals.

None of these procedural issues affect the fact that there is more than sufficient developable land within the adopted settlement boundary of Wareham to meet the housing requirement of 300 set out in the emerging Local Plan.

2. Delivery of WNP Allocations

Wareham is a very constrained settlement in Planning terms with all the destinations listed in footnote 6 of NPPF present. Land to the South, East and West is designated as AONB where NPPF para 172 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and where the scale and extent of development should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances and where it is in the public interest. To the West, North and East the Town lies within the Green Belt where NPPF paras 136 and 137 state that "boundaries should be altered only where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified" and after all other reasonable options for meeting development needs have

been fully examined, including making as much use as possible of suitable brownfield and underutilised sites.

The starting point for the WNP was therefore to maximise the use of brownfield and underutilised land within the Town before considering whether it was necessary to consider green field land. Bringing forward brownfield land is not an easy task as developers will always prefer much easier to develop green field sites. However, development of brownfield land is the priority of the Government set out in NPPF and reiterated recently by Ester McVey the Planning and Housing Minister who said we "need to focus on brownfield sites", adding that "regeneration on brownfield sites ... is what we must do". "Because greenfield land, greenfield sites, should not be what we turn to ... first" "and it is only in the most exceptional circumstances we turn there," she said. (Planning Resource 17.9.19)

Local residents drew attention to underutilised land at Westminster Road and Johns Road Industrial Estates. The WNP proposes that 30 dwellings be provided in Westminster Road in the Plan period up to 2034. The owner of units 1, 16 and 17 wishes to bring these forward for new homes and intends to submit a planning application on Unit 1. His business is now concentrated on a site at Kingston where he is about to construct a large cold store and office accommodation which has planning consent. Whilst this is under construction for the next 4 – 5 months he intends to use Unit 1 for office accommodate and units 16 and 17 for storage prior to decanting all uses back to his new building. These sites will then be free for residential development.

The owner of Units 2 and 3 has let the premises on a short lease until early 2022. The units are in a dilapidated state and needs considerable investment with some works currently being carried out by the tenants. At the beginning of 2022 he intends to consider his options including residential development.

At Johns Road on the North side the former Bindon Engineering factory is on a short let to a wood stove sales company and the site owners intention is to seek planning permission for residential development shortly. This site is next to the mainline railway station and bus stops and ideal for residential development. Bindon Engineering relocated some years ago to modern premises at Holton Heath.

Dorset Council was formed in April 2019 and is currently reviewing all its land holdings in Wareham. The former Middle School site has been vacant since 2013 when it became redundant following a restructuring of education provision. This site is proposed for a new health hub, extra care and elderly persons housing and affordable housing. Planning permission is to be sought in March 2020 with completion expected in December 2022. This will free up local family housing units. NHS funding towards the Health Hub has been achieved.

The current Health Centre site will be vacated on completion of the new Health Hub and be available for development. The Hospital bedded accommodation unit closed recently and the site is now only used for outpatient services which will be relocated to the Health Hub, when the site will be released for residential development. The HNS and Dorset Council have agreed a MoU to bring forward this development.

In addition, redevelopment for housing of other Council owned sites at Sandford lane and Bonnets Lane is being considered. There is therefore considerable further potential for residential development within the Town without going into green field sites.

Statement from Wareham Town Council

Planning permission has been granted for 9 units on the former market site in East Street and development has commenced.

National Grid Property has confirmed that the former gas works site is to be released for development next year. The site has previously had planning permission for 13 housing units.

These sites are all developable and there is every prospect that they will be delivered. They are likely to total in excess of 200 housing units. The remainder 100 units are expected to be delivered through windfall development which has averaged 10 units pa over the past 15 years. This has been discounted by 33% to produce a prudent assessment of future delivery.

08/10/2019

