

North Dorset District Council Local Plan 2011 to 2026 Part 1 Examination

Opening Statement by the District Council

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present a brief opening statement at the start of these hearing sessions, which form part of the examination of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1. My name is Stephen Hill and I am the Council's General Manager with responsibility for planning policy. I would like to welcome you all to the Local Plan Examination Hearing Sessions and to extend our welcome to all those who will be participating during the next two weeks.

The plan has been prepared with the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities. It has evolved from a 'draft core strategy', which was published in March 2010 into a 'new style local plan', which includes a strategic site allocation for the southern extension of Gillingham and a suite of development management policies.

Consultation on the Pre-submission Document took place in late 2013 / early 2014 and following a late objection from English Heritage, the Council undertook further consultation on 'focused changes' relating to Blandford during the summer of 2014. The plan was then submitted in December 2014, together with a schedule of proposed changes that sought to address a number of issues raised at that stage.

The Local Plan Part 1 has been developed during a time of great change with the abolition of regional planning and the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and subsequently the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). We have responded to the challenges arising from these changes so that the Local Plan Part 1 meets the requirements of the new legislation and reflects national policy and guidance.

The Council has always worked closely with its local communities, helping them to produce town and parish plans and in 2013 North Dorset was awarded the Best Community Partnerships Award by the Local Government Chronicle and the Health Service Journal. This close working with communities has continued during the preparation of the Plan.

The Localism Act has provided an opportunity to establish a strategic policy framework that facilitates the production of neighbourhood plans in the District, giving local communities a greater role in shaping the places in which they live and work. Local communities have risen to that challenge and at the current time there are 9 neighbourhood plans in production covering 13 parishes and over 60% of the District's population.

The Council is also aware of the need to establish a strategic policy framework that enables sufficient homes and jobs to be provided to meet future needs. The Plan makes such provision:

- by identifying broad locations for growth at the District's four main towns; and
- by identifying a strategic site allocation at Gillingham with the capacity to accommodate 1,800 homes - making it one of the largest residential development proposals in rural Dorset.

The plan also:

- makes provision for sufficient additional employment land;
- identifies sites for regeneration in and close to town centres;
- identifies the infrastructure needed to support growth; and
- provides a strategic policy framework to enable communities in the countryside to meet their local and essential rural needs.

The Council firmly believes in the plan-led system. Our communities are looking for certainty around plan-making and developers are anxious to deliver the growth proposed in the Plan. North Dorset is an area of very high environmental quality where delays could lead to 'planning by appeal' with potentially damaging results. It would therefore help us greatly if we can move speedily through the examination and report process in order to achieve the adoption of the Plan as soon as possible.

The Council has prepared what we believe to be a sound Local Plan, supported by a requisite evidence base. Fundamentally, we want a sound plan that is best for North Dorset. With this in mind, we invite the Inspector to propose modifications to the Local Plan if they are considered to be necessary to make the Plan sound.

I would like to introduce the Council team that will be supporting the hearing sessions. Trevor Warrick, the former Planning Policy Manager, has recently taken up a new appointment with the West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Partnership, but has been seconded back to North Dorset for the duration of the hearings. Nicholas Cardnell, Sarah Jennings, Nicola Laszlo, Ian Smith and Terry Sneller will be the principal witnesses for the Council alongside Mr. Warrick. The Council will also be supported by other staff and consultants who will be introduced during the course of the hearing sessions.

Finally, I would like to thank the Planning Policy Team for the significant amount of work they have put in to get us to this point and our Councillors, in particular Councillor David Walsh the Portfolio Holder for Development, for their support throughout the process. I look forward to a successful examination and adoption of this important Local Plan.

Stephen Hill: General Manager – Tuesday 10 March 2015