

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Examination

Hearing Statement

for

Matter 13: Eastern Localities of West Dorset



Prepared by West Dorset District Council and
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

November 2014

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Agenda Item 13.1: Paragraph 11.1.5 [CD/SP1] highlights problems with meeting housing and employment needs in Dorchester towards the end of the plan period. Does the Plan identify sufficient land reserves to provide flexibility?

- 1.1 The Submission Plan identifies a housing land supply for 13 years from adoption in 2015, at the new higher rate of housing development, which exceeds the Office for National Statistics (ONS) household forecasts and allows for the trends in household growth that occurred during the previous economic boom. This supply comes from a variety of sites across the whole plan area, including allocations at all the towns and a mix of site sizes, and is considered therefore to provide flexibility for meeting the requirements over this period.
- 1.2 The Submission Plan does not include reserve sites. There are several sites across the whole plan area that have been considered and rejected during the plan's preparation, all of which will need to be considered again during the next review. There were serious concerns raised about many of these sites, such as infrastructure deliverability problems and impact on heritage assets. The councils have not selected any preferences between these sites and instead wish to consider them in a proper review of the plan, in which the local community can be consulted again on all the options. With a full 13-year land supply from adoption, it is considered that the plan period is long enough to allow time for this review to take place as the best way to identify the next sites to be developed.
- 1.3 Paragraph 11.1.5 refers specifically to the needs of Dorchester. As referred to elsewhere in these responses, the councils acknowledge that it is not possible to quantify the scale of development 'needed' at town level, other than by reference to past trends which themselves are influenced by previous planning policies. Dorchester is clearly a major settlement in the plan area, and a significant employment and service centre, generating considerable demand for development. References to its needs are not however intended to imply that these have been specifically quantified or a specific future shortfall identified.
- 1.4 The consultation on future development options across the plan area, in the plan review, will include reconsideration of the options for development at Dorchester, including the potential at Crossways, as well as other parts of the plan area. In particular, the fact that the housing requirement has been raised at a late stage of plan preparation means that the wider consultation on options that took place earlier was not carried out in the context of this higher level of need. The councils

would strongly prefer to address any future needs through a full review to enable this wider engagement to be undertaken.

Agenda Item 13.2: Is the area around Trinity Street an appropriate location for any future expansion of the main shopping area (DOR5)?

- 2.1 Submission Plan Policy DOR4 allocates a significant area of land at Charles Street for the expansion of the main shopping area of Dorchester. This development has planning permission and will form a significant extension of retail provision in the town. The area around Trinity Street was identified in the CBRE retail study (CD/ECON3) as the next preference for potential retail development. It has been identified in the Plan so that the opportunity is retained, should additional need be identified in the future.
- 2.2 The site is well located in relation to the town centre, and includes some relatively underused land. This development would not come forward unless a further need is identified, and it will be necessary to review the situation after the Charles Street development has been completed. This is highlighted in the CBRE update report (CD/ECON4).

Agenda Item 13.3: Do concerns identified in relation to sites at St George's Road (DOR7 and DOR8) and off Alington Avenue (DOR9) undermine the likelihood that these sites will come forward?

- 3.1 The site at Red Cow Farm, carried forward from the previous Adopted Local Plan as Policy DOR7, had planning permission at the time of the submission of the plan, and is now under construction. The concerns raised during the consultation about this site were about proximity to the elevated sections of the Dorchester bypass, the adequacy of the local road network, and the loss of greenfield land. These issues have been considered fully through the planning application process and resolved – and there is no doubt about the development coming forward.
- 3.2 Policies DOR8 and DOR9 allocate two new areas of land in the same area, south of St George's Road and off Alington Avenue. The concerns identified in respect of these two sites were: proximity to the elevated sections of the bypass; adequacy of the local road network; loss of green field and wildlife corridor; inability of drains to cope with runoff from development; previous designation as Land of Local Landscape Importance; and impact on the heritage asset at Max Gate.

- 3.3 The proximity to the bypass has been discussed with the councils' Environmental Health officers. It is considered that mitigation can be provided to reduce the noise impact on residents to an acceptable level, as has been the case with the Red Cow Farm site, allocated in Policy DOR7 and now under construction. All the potential allocations have been discussed with the county Highways Authority throughout the preparation of the plan, and the Highways Agency have also been consulted throughout: neither has objected to the development of these sites.
- 3.4 The plan preparation process has involved a thorough assessment of the potential for development on previously developed land in the urban areas, which has been recently updated in the 2014 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (CD/SUS9). This is not however sufficient to meet all the local housing needs identified in the plan. Therefore, the loss of some greenfield land is inevitable to meet these needs. These particular sites are within the larger built area of the town, and feedback during early consultation on the plan suggested that developing within the existing boundary was preferable to extending outside.
- 3.5 Surface water drainage issues can be dealt with through the design and layout of the development, and this would be a requirement within any application.
- 3.6 While the sites have the local designation of Land of Local Landscape Importance, this has been reviewed and they are not considered to have significant landscape value in terms of the wider setting of the town. The existing pony paddocks are not subject to any formal nature conservation designation.
- 3.7 With regard to the impact of the allocation upon the heritage asset of Max Gate, the setting of the Grade I Listed house has been considered and the development boundary has been kept back from the wooded curtilage to minimise the potential for any further adverse impacts upon the heritage asset. Max Gate is bounded to the west by the cutting of the Dorchester by-pass with built development beyond and there is modern housing to the east in Syward Close.

Agenda Item 13.4: Do proposals for a park and ride site and trunk road service area south of the Stadium Roundabout (DOR10) represent the best option for providing these facilities given the sensitive nature of the location?

- 4.1 The proposal for a park and ride site and trunk road service area south of the Stadium roundabout is the result of an assessment of need and site options.
- 4.2 The park and ride site will reduce the impact of traffic in the town centre and provide parking for workers in the town, while allowing the central car parks to be

available for shoppers. It is part of the wider Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan vision for enhancing the environmental quality of the town through reducing the adverse impacts of traffic. This would have significant benefits for the many heritage assets within the town centre, and for the air quality, which has led to the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area. A park and ride facility for Dorchester is referred to in the Local Transport Plan (CD/COM4) in connection with Air Quality Management Areas (Table 8.1) and in Table 9.1 Public Transport Improvements.

- 4.3 A full assessment of potential park-and-ride sites was undertaken by Buro Happold in 2010 (AD/EAST7). This work involved the analysis of traffic flows around the town in order to identify the optimum location. Around 20 potential sites were assessed initially: this was narrowed down to 6 following the transport and highways assessment, and these six were reduced to two once a fuller assessment of the transport and environmental impacts had been undertaken.
- 4.4 Both the two shortlisted options were within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and both would be visible from the heritage asset at Maiden Castle. The transport assessment work however demonstrated that in order to achieve the objective of intercepting the largest possible proportion of work-related commuting, it was necessary to locate the site to the south or west, as the majority of commuting is from Weymouth. Sites to the north and east of the town, while outside the AONB, would not encourage use by the majority of commuters.
- 4.5 The final assessment between the two sites suggested that the western option was potentially the more deliverable but this site was withdrawn by the landowner. This left the site to the south as the only deliverable option to meet the locational requirements of a park and ride facility. An update to the 2010 report, undertaken by Buro Happold in 2013 (AD/EAST7), confirmed the functional benefits of the southern site. It was noted that the earlier study may have overestimated the potential users coming from the north of the town.
- 4.6 The 2006 Local Plan (CD/POL2) acknowledges that there is a continued need for a Trunk Road Service Area (TRSA) and lorry parking facilities in the Dorchester area. Policy TRAN3 states that proposals for a new primary route service area will be considered at Dorchester. The Submission Plan policy DOR 10 reflects that the need still exists and that the consideration process has been, and is, on-going.
- 4.7 Preliminary Assessment work by Buro Happold in 2013 (AD/EAST7) considered a range of alternative options for a combined P&R and TRSA. Twelve sites were considered which were either directly accessible from the trunk road or had previously been proposed for the TRSA. This concluded that all the sites had some significant environmental constraints, but that the site south of Stadium

roundabout was ideally situated in relation to the Department for Transport distance criteria. It also emphasised the benefits of combining the TRSA with park and ride facilities. These include the sharing of junction access, passenger facilities and security features, plus reduced site construction, operation and maintenance costs. The inclusion of the TRSA could help to bring the park and ride site forward, enabling the environmental benefits to the town to be achieved more quickly.

- 4.8 The assessment found that a combined site is likely to have a greater environmental impact, but that there was potential for mitigation both on and off site.

Agenda Item 13.5: Is Crossways an appropriate location to provide a significant level of housing to help meet some of the needs of Dorchester?

- 5.1 Crossways is considered suitable for the provision of a significant level of housing in West Dorset. While the Submission Plan focuses on meeting the quantified needs for housing across the Housing Market Area, and no longer attempts to quantify need across smaller areas, Dorchester is clearly a major employment and service centre with a significant demand for housing. There is a substantial amount of land allocated at Dorchester, primarily in the form of the ongoing Poundbury development. However, the further expansion of Dorchester faces significant challenges, particularly in relation to the impact on heritage assets, delivery of necessary transport infrastructure and the breaching the line of the bypass or the watermeadows.
- 5.2 Crossways is located only six miles from Dorchester and the West Dorset District Council's 2007 Rural Functionality Study (CD/SUS5) showed that there was significant out-commuting from Crossways, largely to Dorchester. While the plan does not seek to encourage commuting, this is of short distance and has potential to be carried out by public transport. Crossways is close to Moreton Station which has hourly train services to Dorchester, with only a seven-minute travel time. There are also hourly bus services and easy access by car and cycle.
- 5.3 The settlement is outside the AONB and development would have a low visual impact in the wider landscape.
- 5.4 There is the potential for development at Crossways to secure improvements to community facilities. Currently there is a school, village hall, youth centre, shop, library and doctors' surgery, but these are dispersed around the village and some, such as the village hall, are of poor quality. There is also the opportunity for new facilities to be enabled, such as indoor sports facilities for which there is a demand.

Agenda Item 13.6: There is potential for the proposed scale of development (in relation to both the original and alternative proposals) to adversely affect sites of international importance to birds. Can adequate mitigation measures be put in place to minimise the detrimental impact of human intrusion?

- 6.1 Development at Crossways could potentially have adverse effects on sites of international importance to birds by increasing recreational use of the Tadnoll Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which lies a relatively short distance to the east. This could cause disturbance to some of the sensitive heathland bird species.
- 6.2 The approach that has been agreed with Natural England (SOCG/2) is that Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space or SANGS should be provided, so that there is a convenient and attractive alternative option. The indicative area for SANGS in relation to the development proposed at Crossways has been shown on the Proposals Map. These have been agreed with Natural England and discussions are ongoing about securing this land in perpetuity. Natural England has agreed that this is an effective means of mitigation, and the proposed SANGS are much closer, and more accessible, to the development than Tadnoll Heath, to which people in Crossways are more likely to drive.

Agenda Item 13.7: Are there adequate measures in place to ensure services and facilities and improvements to essential infrastructure will be delivered to minimise the impact of development?

- 7.1 There are adequate measures in place to ensure that services and facilities, and improvements to essential infrastructure, will be delivered in order to minimise the impact of development. Any planning permission for the development will be subject to a Section 106 Agreement for the delivery of the necessary infrastructure.
- 7.2 Discussions between the council, the developer, and service and infrastructure providers have resulted in a comprehensive list of infrastructure improvements and provision that will be required in conjunction with the development.
- 7.3 Since the submission of the Submission Plan, outline planning permission has been granted for 1,000 units of holiday accommodation on the former Warmwell Quarry, directly to the west of Crossways. This has secured the route for a potential new link road that would become the main route between Crossways and Dorchester. It would re-route traffic away from the surface level crossing and the low bridge at West Stafford. Both of these have been identified by Network Rail for safety

improvements in line with their strategy to close or improve surface level crossings in order to reduce safety risks. The holiday accommodation development will also include some facilities that will be accessible to Crossways residents.

Agenda Item 13.8: The recommended changes to the Plan identify the southern area of the settlement as the preferred location for development. Is this the most appropriate area given the various constraints and issues affecting the settlement?

- 8.1 The SHLAA 2011(CD/SUS2), identified a number of options for development around Crossways that were potentially appropriate, and were relatively unconstrained.
- 8.2 The preference for the southern area over the northern option came out strongly from the community consultation (particularly the public meeting held in the village by the parish council, at which both developers presented their schemes). This was partly due to the lesser impact of this option on existing residential areas, but also due to the southern site's potential to provide more of a centre to the village, and to enable the provision of some natural traffic calming on the Warmwell Road.
- 8.3 Traffic calming measures could help to reduce traffic speeds, including quarry traffic, and improve the pedestrian environment. The presence of development on either side of the road could enable it to become more of a street rather than a highway. It has the potential to become a space between buildings which will be shared by traffic and people, and which becomes an active connection between the northern and southern parts of the village. Improved pedestrian and cycle access to the station alongside the road could also be achieved.
- 8.4 While community facilities are dispersed through the settlement, several are on or close to, the Warmwell Road and development in this location could enable them to be focused here as a village centre. The village hall is on the southern side of the road and development here would help it to become a more integral part of the village with better pedestrian and cycle linkages. Alternatively it may be possible to relocate it within the new development, close to the potential village centre.
- 8.5 Potential SANGS locations have been considered for the development options in both southern and northern sites, and the indicative SANGS areas for the allocated site are shown on the Proposals Map. A further advantage of the southern site is that the proposed SANGS is directly connected to the development unlike the site to the north, which was on the other side of the railway line and so less easily accessible.