

## COUNCIL MEETING – 19 JANUARY 2010

### CORE STRATEGY PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSES – DETAILED ASSESSMENT

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present to Members a detailed assessment of the results of the Core Strategy public consultation from 7<sup>th</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009 and to seek authority to commission consultants to undertake testing of alternative housing scenarios against Habitat Regulations.

#### 2. KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The public consultation commenced on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2009 and was originally due to end on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2009. During the consultation the deadline was extended to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009 to ensure that people were given adequate time to comment and to take account of reports of non-delivery of questionnaires.
- 2.2 Around 24,000 questionnaires were delivered to homes and businesses in Purbeck. The Council has received 1936 questionnaire responses, which represents an 8% response rate. In addition to the questionnaires, 104 letters and detailed response forms were received making. This is a high response rate to this type of consultation.
- 2.3 The preliminary results of the consultation were presented to Policy Group on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2009 and are dealt with through the minutes of this Council meeting. This includes the request for £10,000 to commission a Retail Impact Assessment of the supermarket proposal in Wareham. These preliminary results were updated to include late submissions and more detailed comments and taken to Policy Group on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2010. A late response from Wareham Town Council was reported orally to that Policy Group and has subsequently been incorporated into this amended report. The consultation arrangements and feedback the Council received is set out in **Appendix 1**. Comments on the location of development and the location of a supermarket are set out in **Appendix 2**. The comments on all of the other policies in the Core Strategy are set out in **Appendix 3**.
- 2.4 The Council has received a letter from Natural England supporting the Council's stance to exclude the Western Sector. A letter from Government Office for the South West (GOSW), included in **Appendix 4**, significantly, does not object to the Council's decision to exclude the Western Sector. This is encouraging and was endorsed at a follow up meeting with GOSW and Natural England in December 2009. This was the first opportunity officers and Natural England had been given to explain to GOSW the constraints posed by Habitats Regulations to the development of housing within the District.
- 2.5 However, GOSW strongly advise, in taking the Core Strategy forward to public examination in the possible situation where the final RSS is not published, that the onus is on the Council to prove to an Inspector that it has done everything it can to meet the housing needs of the SE Dorset conurbation in the District. This means in practice that the Council will have to be satisfied that it has robust evidence to show the Western Sector is not deliverable. This evidence was prepared last year by Footprint Ecology on behalf of PDC, DCC and Natural England and submitted as part of the Council's representations to the RSS Proposed Changes.
- 2.6 If the Council continues to exclude the Western Sector from future drafts of the Core Strategy, GOSW advise that it must also be confident that it has evidence that higher housing levels cannot be achieved as this will be subject to rigorous examination at the future public inquiry into the Core Strategy. It is important that the Council's assumption that 2400 dwellings is the maximum number of dwellings achievable bearing in mind the Habitats Regulations constraints. Therefore testing of higher housing scenarios will form an essential part of the Core Strategy evidence base if it is to be found to be "sound" at public inquiry. It is estimated that testing will cost up to £15,000 and be completed in Spring 2010. This would be met by Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.
- 2.7 Responses were also received from a number of Parish Councils, Parish and Town Plan groups, developers, landowners, utility companies and other statutory consultees such as the Highways Agency, Dorset County Council, Environment Agency, English Heritage, etc. The responses are generally positive and provide clear actions to improve the robustness of the Core Strategy.

- 2.8 It is encouraging that Wareham Town Council has supported the settlement extension and supermarket proposals at Wareham. Bere Regis Parish Council has also supported their proposed settlement extension. However it is disappointing that Swanage Town Council and Wool Parish Council have chosen not to support extensions to their settlement. On the other hand, Corfe Castle Parish Council does not think enough housing has been provided for them and this needs further consideration. The Highways Agency have maintained their concerns about any development at Bere Regis and Lytchett Matravers and the impact of additional car trips on roads under their responsibility (A31 and A35).
- 2.9 It is anticipated submitting the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State in early 2011. In the meantime a large amount of additional work is required to ensure there is evidence to support the Council's assumption of a maximum of 2400 dwellings and to identify and plan in detail the proposed settlement extensions. NHS Dorset is keen to find alternative sites for new health care facilities within both Swanage and Wareham as part of the proposed settlement extensions. This is a major opportunity to improve the facilities within each town. At Wareham there is the opportunity to improve the Purbeck School and Sports Centre through the school review and link this into a settlement extension. In Swanage there is opportunity to investigate how a new sports hall could be provided for the benefit of residents. These are some of the ideas that require investigation. The Council is bidding to government for funding of the master planning of settlement extensions and if successful this could help fund consultants to undertake this work. It is further anticipated that the public will be consulted on proposed settlement extensions in summer 2010 for incorporation in the Core Strategy prior to submission to the Secretary of State.

### **3. RECOMMENDATION**

#### **3.1 Council endorses publication of the consultation results**

#### **3.2 Council agree to commission testing of the Council's assumption that environmental constraints will inhibit the delivery of housing in excess of the 2400 dwellings, which were the subject of the consultation**

### **4. POLICY ISSUES**

#### **4.1 How will this affect the environment, social issues and the local economy?**

4.1.1 The Council has a duty to plan for development through the Core Strategy. Housing growth is required to meet local and sub-regional housing need and new employment, retail and community facilities should be provided to accompany housing growth, and thereby reduce the need to travel to access day to day services and facilities. New development must be considered in relation to the protection and conservation of the natural and built environment, the creation of mixed and thriving communities, and ensuring economic wellbeing, accessibility and local distinctiveness.

4.1.2 Testing of higher housing numbers will attempt to balance housing need against the constraints posed by nature conservation in Purbeck.

#### **4.2 Resource Implications**

Testing of housing scenarios against Habitats Regulations is expected to cost up to £15,000. It is proposed to use Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to fund this necessary work. It is important to seek the view of specialist consultants who are preparing the Council's Appropriate Assessment alongside the Core Strategy. The Council does not have the resources or expertise to undertake this work. Some officer time will be necessary to commission the work and liaise with the consultants.

### **Appendices: 4**

Background papers: Core Strategy Issues and Options – Planning Purbeck's Future - September 2009.

#### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:-**

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