

The Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination March 2012

Matter 4 – Housing and Housing Supply (Policy HS)

Introduction/Background

In 2005 the Regional Assembly started preparing a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South-West. Meetings were held between Regional staff and county and district officers to establish housing targets for each district. The initial view of the Region was that Purbeck should be considered as an environmentally sensitive area rather like Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks. The County Council who had a duty to advise the Region on appropriate housing numbers agreed with this approach and proposed in their section 4/4 advice to the Regional Assembly 75 dwellings per annum making a total of 1,500 dwellings over the period 2006 - 2026. However at a meeting with the Regional staff in November 2005 the Purbeck planning policy officer argued strongly for an increase in housing allocation on the grounds that this would enable more affordable housing to be provided. The submission draft RSS included an allocation of 105 dwellings pa for the District, making a total of 2,100. Following the Examination in Public the figure for the District was increased by the government to 2,400 dwellings. The public consultation draft core strategy issued in September 2009 stated that the district council objected to this increase and promised that the council would reduce the housing numbers if the government decided to revert to 2,100 dwellings. However even though RSS has been abolished this promise has been forgotten as the current core strategy still proposes 2,400 dwellings over the period 2006-26 – actually now **2,520** in the submitted version of Policy HS.

Clearly providing land for this scale of development in one of the most sensitive and heavily designated environmental areas of Britain was going to be an enormous challenge. It could only be achieved by rolling back the boundaries of key designations such as the Green Belt, reducing the extent of conservation areas and by building close to nature conservation sites.

The drive for housing at the top end of the RSS range is stated by officers to be to enable a large amount of affordable housing to be delivered. Yet Government policy on this issue has changed significantly over the past year. The Homes and Communities Agency have stated that Social Housing Grant is no longer available for allocated sites where affordable housing is a S106 obligation. Bloor Homes have stated at the public consultation on 1st October that as a result 25% affordable housing would be the most they could provide on the site at Worgret Road. Thus the Council's aspiration of at least 100 of the 200 homes being affordable looks totally unrealistic. On the south side of Worgret Road recent new housing is on the market for between £1.2 and 1.45million. The market homes are hardly likely to be affordable to local people.

Meanwhile the Coalition Government is, through the Localism Bill, scrapping Regional Spatial Strategy and replacing it with a “bottom up” approach of neighbourhood planning with local communities deciding how much and where development should go. The very foundations of the current plan, which is based on RSS targets, is seriously flawed. Insufficient heed is paid to the environmental designations and special characteristics of

Purbeck and the effect such a level of housing development will have on the area – for instance its general proximity to heathland.

What particular part of the Core strategy is unsound?

The excessive level of housing provision and its spatial allocation in Policy HS.

Which criteria set out in paragraph 182 of the NPPF does it fail?

Given the forthcoming abolition of the Regional Strategies (and the RSS is still only a draft document in the South West), the 'bottom-up' approach to determining housing numbers in the Localism Act, and the need for sustainable development to achieve a balance between its economic, social & environmental aspects as set out in the NPPF, the amount and spatial distribution of housing set out in Policy HS is not justified and not consistent with national policy.

Why does it fail?

As set out above.

How can the Core Strategy be made sound?

Provide for no more than 2,100 dwellings allocating more of these dwellings to Crossways and considering in greater depth the possibility of a strategic extension in Holton Heath/Sandford.

What is the precise change/wording we are seeking?

Re-write Policy HS accordingly, or preferably reconsult on a new spatial distribution for no more than 2,100 additional dwellings between now and 2027.