

Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan SEA Scoping – July 2015

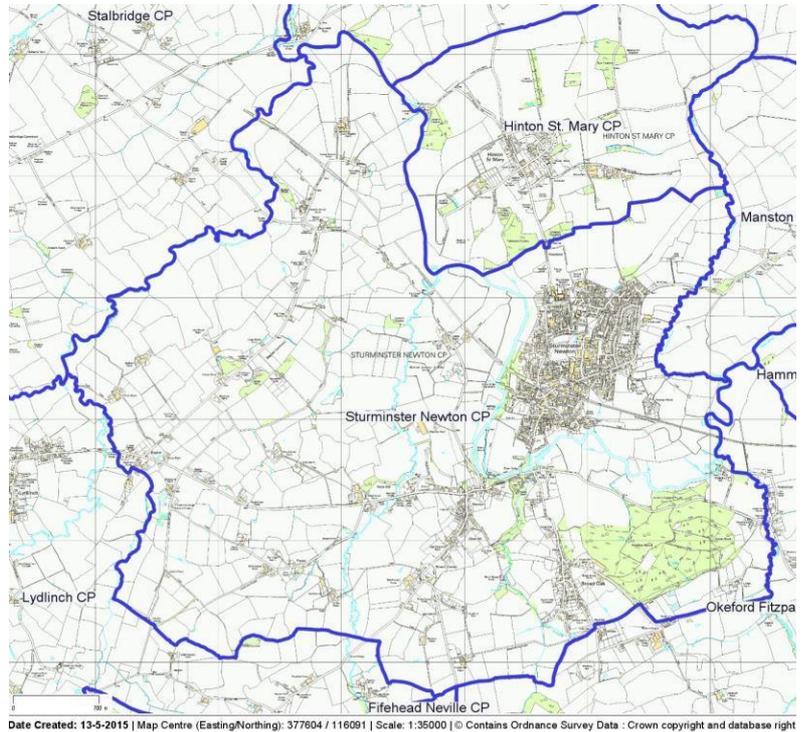
Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan area

The Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan area was designated by North Dorset District Council in February 2014. It follows the parish boundary, as shown:

Background – work done to date

During the last year the neighbourhood plan group has spent time working with the local community to understand the issues that they would like to see addressed through a neighbourhood plan.

The Parish Council now has a draft vision for the area that reflects the views of the local community, and draft aims to guide the development of the neighbourhood plan. The Council hopes to be in a position to have a draft plan ready for consultation in the Spring of next year, by which time hopefully the Local Plan that sets the strategic policies for the area should be adopted.



Draft Vision and Aims for the Neighbourhood Plan

The following draft vision has been agreed:

OUR VISION

The Parish of Sturminster Newton is somewhere that more people want to visit, set up business, live and work in, bring up their families in, and retire to. The town is considered to be a contemporary Dorset market town, that

- has a safer, more vibrant and more “user-friendly” town centre
- serves the needs of the surrounding rural area, its residents and businesses
- retains and attracts new industries, businesses and services

Development here will be achieved in a sustainable way and enhances the strong sense of community, such that it

- respects and protects our heritage - including open spaces in the town, the town's attractive historic centre and its beautiful landscape setting, and the rural character of the rest of the Parish
- minimises its impact on the environment
- is matched by the necessary services and facilities - sports, leisure and community facilities, footpaths and cycle-ways, health and care services, schools and shops

To drive the development of the neighbourhood plan, a number of aims have been developed around themed areas that were articulated in the vision

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> Improving the role and function of the town

The plan should help articulate a distinctive identity and role for the town, at the heart of the local community, that helps in marketing and developing its capabilities and opportunities. This could build on the success of local food producers and retailers, the Cheese Festival and producers' markets.

> Improving the town centre and employment opportunities

The plan should set out the strategy for improving the attractiveness, safety and accessibility of the town centre to visitors and shoppers. This is likely to include

- providing a better environment for the Monday market, food and craft retailers and the development of a successful “street-culture”
- sufficient parking close to the centre
- improving access and safety for disabled visitors to the town centre
- improving branding, marketing and signage
- making better use and improving the appearance of the Station Road car park area and the disused land near the corner of Market Hill and Station Road
- developing business support services and tourism opportunities

Both within the town centre, and elsewhere in the parish, opportunities to support existing and attract new businesses should be developed, potentially focusing on start-up businesses and food-related industries. This may include the provision of appropriate and flexible office and business accommodation and related support services, and support for the diversification of local agricultural businesses. Nearly all business would benefit from improved broadband and mobile access and performance, and therefore the plan should support the provision of better services in the area.

> Delivering the right amount of housing for our needs

The plan should make sure that the mix of housing types in new developments meets the evolving needs and aspirations of people living in the Parish, including provision for the elderly, disabled and migrant/temporary workers, and aspirational housing that helps attract new, high paid industries to locate in the area. The plan will include opportunities for self-build/cooperative schemes and work/live units where there is evidence of demand. The plan should consider the potential for limited development in the hamlets outside the defined settlement boundary of the town itself.

> Protecting and making the most of our heritage

All new development should maintain and encourage a sense of community. The plan will identify buildings, streets and other features of historic or cultural interest in the Parish that are important and should be protected. Design policies will protect and conserve the character and aspects of local buildings, streets, landscape features, views and spaces that are valued by the community. New buildings should be designed to a high standard, blend harmoniously into the landscape and be in keeping with the existing character of the town and its surrounding hamlets. The plan should also include policies to protect key views into and outward from the town, and protect the green spaces valued by the community

> Making sure that development minimises its impact on the environment

The plan should help make sure that development incorporates renewable energy provision wherever feasible. However, this needs to be balanced against the impact of large-scale renewable energy installations where they damage the landscape, key views or the areas's potential for tourism. Opportunities should therefore focus on the potential to install renewable energy systems on buildings and the hydro-electricity and biomass potential, which are unlikely to adversely affect the river corridor and wider landscape.

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Development should be located where it is well-connected to existing services and facilities, and opportunities taken to improve access to the businesses and services in the town through footpaths and cycle routes that are usable in all weathers and by people using mobility scooters or pushing prams. Improving access to the wider countryside could be of real benefit both to local residents and visitors, so the plan should encourage completion of the Trailway to Stalbridge and its link to the North Dorset Business Park, and develop other opportunities to provide recreational footpath / cycle links.

Designs and layouts of new development should incorporate green spaces, trees and green corridors. New developments should also consider watercourse, drainage and flooding implications.

> Making sure that infrastructure keeps pace with housing development

The plan needs to make sure that the town's roads will not become congested or unsafe as new development comes forward. A strategy is required setting out where improvements will be needed to the road network, and projects to improve pedestrian, cycling and public transport access to services and facilities in the Parish.

The plan also needs to make sure that the town's community facilities, schools and services have sufficient capacity to meet the long-term needs of the community, and that this is delivered in parallel with significant new developments. A coordinated approach needs to be taken on the development of a sports and leisure hub in the north of the town, in parallel with the relocation and expansion of the primary school. The future of the swimming pool (on the current primary school site) needs to be considered, along with the potential use of this site. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the role of the Exchange as a community hub that consolidates key services and organisations in a central location, and thereby potentially frees land for other uses.

The next stages on the plan's preparation

There is likely to be some form of consultation this autumn to help make sure the neighbourhood plan reflects what the local community wants. Over the summer the neighbourhood plan working group are gathering evidence to help guide possible options for people to comment on at this consultation. This will include work on housing needs and development land requirements for this area, particularly as the Local Plan may now run to 2031 and the District Council may come under pressure to undertake an early review of their plan and potentially identify further sites for development. Other areas of focus are the regeneration of the town centre, as well as more general guidance to make sure the plan protects the character of the town and rural areas.

The neighbourhood plan group will therefore be focusing on five important areas of work, which will provide the evidence and building blocks for developing sound policies for inclusion in the neighbourhood plan. These workstreams will run in tandem and feed into the autumn consultation.

> Development Land Review (housing)

The plan will look at the evidence on housing need, as well as the capacity and delivery of key sites and infill development in the area. Design briefs will then be drawn up for key sites, and consideration given to whether it may be prudent to identify further sites (either to deliver the Local Plan's housing target or more if the housing target is likely to be increased through the review of the plan).

> Community Assets Review

Linked to the above work is a community assets review, which will identify opportunities where new or expanded community facilities can and should be located, inform future updates to the District Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan, and potentially set local standards for things like open space provision in new developments.

> Transport Study

Also linked to the development land review is understanding the transport issues. The neighbourhood plan hopes to contain a clear transport strategy for the parish, that takes into account current concerns and traffic growth from future development. The main focus of concern is the Town Centre and northern expansion area.

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> Town Centre Study

The plan needs to be based on a clear understanding of the business interests in the town centre, and the land / planning requirements to help support business growth in line with the emerging vision for the town centre area. This study will include the wider area covered by the Station Road Development Brief, and also the relationship with Butts Pond, where there are several retail businesses. The neighbourhood plan could develop possible ideas that would form the basis of a planning blueprint for the town centre. This might include, for example, the extent of town centre core area where retail outlets should be focused, and use of more flexible planning policies for shopfronts, changes of use to or from retail outside of this core area, the role and requirements for tourism / leisure events, the various markets and other attractions, and the changes to the pedestrian environment and parking arrangements.

> Local Character Review (urban and rural)

The neighbourhood plan hopes to identify and assess the particular features and spaces in the area that are of special value and contribute to the local character, and to develop potential design policies for protecting those assets and specifying the design requirements for new development. This takes forward (and extends into the rural areas) the work that was done on the 2008 Town Design Statement and helps us to develop site-specific and criteria-based policies, and more detailed design and development briefs, to be included in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Other work areas

The above workstreams form the main scope of the plan. However there are other areas of work that also fall within the potential scope of the plan:

Rural enterprises – possible policy changes to help support appropriate agricultural diversification in keeping with the character of the area

Climate Change Mitigation and Renewables – looking at the findings of the Landscape Sensitivity Study and how these might be incorporated into the neighbourhood plan, and potential projects such as a further Hydroelectric Scheme on the River Stour, and solar panels on The Exchange

Strategic Environmental Assessment – how this work is being progressed

At this stage we do not know whether there will be a requirement to undertake a full **Strategic Environmental Assessment** (SEA) or whether the District Council (in consultation with the statutory bodies Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) will be satisfied that there are unlikely to be any significant environmental impacts and therefore can screen out the need for an SEA. However, because the plan may need to look at alternative development sites if the need arises, it makes sense to undertake some preliminary work on the SEA scoping, which will be helpful in any case to guide the plan and its sustainability. The first step is to collate some basic information on the environment sensitivity of the area (in liaison with the District Council), and consult the three statutory bodies on the possible scope of the SEA. As progress is made on the neighbourhood plan and if it appears that an SEA is not likely to be necessary, a formal SEA screening request will be submitted to the District Council.

Mapped planning issues and constraints

Factor	Issue	Findings
Flooding	Fluvial flood risk	There are fluvial flood zones 2/3 through the parish along the River Stour and River Divelish. These largely fall outside of the defined settlement boundaries in the Local Plan, although there are small areas of overlap
	Surface water flooding	Indicative surface water flood maps indicate potential for some flooding across much of the area, with potential higher risk (1 in 30 years) present in parts of the town.

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Factor	Issue	Findings
Heritage assets	Conservation Area	Sturminster Newton Conservation Area (designated 09/04/1976) covering the southern part of the town and parts of Newton. There is no published Conservation Area Appraisal, but a Historic Towns Study was completed for the town in early 2011 https://www.dorsetforyou.com/article/392402/Sturminster-Newton---historic-towns-survey
	Historic Parks and Gardens	None recorded within or close to the plan area
	Listed Buildings	There are 121 Listed buildings or structures in the plan area, the most notable being: Grade I listing: Town Bridge; Church of St Mary; and Fiddleford Mill House Grade II* listing: Sturminster Newton Mill; Sturminster Newton Castle
	Registered Battlefield	None recorded within or close to the plan area
	Scheduled monuments	There are three scheduled monuments in the plan area: - Sturminster Castle - Fiddleford Manor - Medieval cross 200m north west of St Mary's Church There are also a number of undesignated monuments across the plan area
	World Heritage Sites	None recorded within or close to the plan area
Landscape	AONB	Not applicable to the plan area – the AONB covers part of the adjoining parish of Okeford Fitzpaine (approx. 1.7km distant)
	Greenbelt	Not applicable to the plan area
	Heritage Coast	Not applicable to the plan area
Nature conservation	Sites of special scientific interest (and European designations)	Piddles Wood SSSI in south-east part of the plan area. Outside but within 1km of the plan area: - Blackmore Vale Commons And Moors SSSI – also part Rooksmoor SAC Outside but within 5km of the plan area: - Hod and Hambledon Hill SSSI - Shillingstone Quarry SSSI
	Protected species	Records show the potential presence of a range of protected species, including: Bats (variety of species) Birds (Barn Owl; Bittern; Fieldfare; Hobby; Kingfisher; Little Egret; Little Ringed Plover; Red Kite) Butterflies (Brown Hairstreak; Marsh Fritillary) Mammals (Eurasian Badger; European Otter; European Water Vole; Hazel Dormouse) Reptiles (Great Crested Newt; Grass Snake; Palmate Newt; Smooth Newt)

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Factor	Issue	Findings
	Sites of local nature conservation interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Butts Pond Meadows LNR and SNCI - Bagber Drovers SNCI - The Coombs SNCI - Broad Oak Community Orchard SNCI - Hinton Watermeadows SNCI Outside but close the plan area: Plumber Coppice SNCI; Twinwood Coppice SNCI; Spar/Meatyards Coppice SNCI; Okeford Common SNCI; Thornhill Copse SNCI; Conygar Coppice SNCI; and Tan-hill Copse SNCI
	Ancient woodland and known veteran trees	Piddles Wood SSSI is ancient woodland, and there are a number of veteran trees recorded across the plan area. A further seven areas of ancient woodland lie outside but within 1km of the plan area.
Settlement and land use	Settlement / land use area	Main settlement of Sturminster Newton, with smaller hamlets at Broad Oak, Newton and Bagber
	Agricultural land value	Grade 3 or 4
	Minerals safeguarding	The area includes part of minerals safeguarding area (however areas within defined settlement boundary have been excluded)
	Land contamination	There is a known historic landfill site at Disused Railway Cutting West off Bath Road No part of the plan area is recorded as Groundwater Protection zone or Nitrate Vulnerable zone
Population and human health	Population profile	Current population is 4,355 (as of the 2011 census). The population profile is broadly in line with the Dorset average, with slight less people in the higher age brackets (60+) and marginally higher proportion of younger residents up to 40 years of age.
	Health	Just over 80% of Sturminster Newton residents enjoy good or very good health (2011 census) whilst less than 5% are limited by bad health. These figures are very much in line with those of North Dorset and Dorset as a whole.

Scoping consultation

Unless the requirement is screened out, the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 will require that an environmental assessment is prepared to accompany the neighbourhood plan. If this is confirmed, the environmental report will need to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the neighbourhood plan; and the reasonable alternatives (taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan). The report shall include information on aspects such as biodiversity, fauna and flora; population and human health; soil, water, air and climatic factors; material assets; cultural heritage; landscape; and the inter-relationship between these issues as may reasonably be required, taking account of factors such as the likely content and level of detail that will be contained in the plan and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels (which could include the Local Plan's assessment).

When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) must be consulted. This document forms the basis for triggering that consultation. In particular advice is sought on the following:

- > Which of the topic areas it may be pertinent to include in an assessment - ie biodiversity; population; human health; fauna; flora; soil; water; air; climatic factors; material assets; cultural heritage; landscape
- > Whether the above planning issues and constraints appear to have any significant omissions

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- > Which plans and programmes may be relevant and should be referred to in the environmental report
- > Any relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and environmental characteristics of areas that should be considered
- > Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
- > Any environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which could usefully be taken into consideration, and any further advice on possible objectives for assessing the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the neighbourhood plan