

Purbeck District Council Core Strategy Examination in Public

Hearing Statement
on behalf of Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd
(Respondent Reference 2799)

Matter 1: Basis for the Overall Approach of the DPD

April 2012

Purbeck District Council Core Strategy

Examination in Public

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(Respondent Reference: 2799)**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement is submitted on behalf of Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd to Matter 1 (Basis for the Overall Approach of the DPD) of the Examination in Public into the Purbeck District Core Strategy Examination in Public. Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd are the promoters of strategic residential led development of land to the West of Wareham.
- 1.2 This Statement is specifically intended to respond to the Inspector's questions and set out Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd case on matters of soundness.

2.0 RESPONSE TO INSPECTOR'S QUESTIONS

Issue 1.1: Does the DPD have regard to national and sub-regional policy and if there are any divergences how are these justified? What are the implications of the forthcoming revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies? Are there satisfactory linkages with the Purbeck Community Plan and other local strategies? Has the duty to co-operate been fulfilled?

1.1.1 The NPPF¹ confirms in paragraph 14 that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is the golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. It says clearly that Local Plans (Core Strategies and other DPDs) **"should meet objectively assessed needs."**

1.1.2 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF confirms that there are three dimensions to sustainable development, economic, social and environmental. Paragraph 8 confirms that

"these roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent...Therefore to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system."

In essence the Government has made it expressly clear that the creation of jobs, provision of new homes, improving infrastructure and achieving good design stand alongside achieving net gains for biodiversity and nature².

1.1.3 The NPPF contains core planning principles, which include the need to proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, businesses and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs³. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.⁴

1.1.4 In respect of new homes, national policy requires Local Plans to meet **"the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework."**⁵

1.1.5 The principal divergence with national and emerging Regional Policy is the failure by the Council to accommodate the defined housing needs of the District. All LPAs must

¹ National Planning Policy Framework, published 27th March 2012

² NPPF Paragraph 9

³ NPPF Paragraph 17

⁴ NPPF Paragraph 19

establish through evidence a sound housing requirement, which must take into account housing need and demographic growth. The fact that the Council are only proposing to make provision for 2,520 dwellings over the plan period when provision should clearly be made for at least 5,150 in total in line with the evidence based approach of the draft Regional Strategy, has a detrimental, knock-on effect on the establishment of an appropriate strategy. Therefore it is considered that the housing requirement for Purbeck must now be reconsidered as part of the Core Strategy process against the background of local need to ensure that the local housing requirements of the District are met.

- 1.1.6 Furthermore, consideration should be given to the 'Planning for Growth' statement of 23rd March 2011 by the Minister of State for Decentralisation sets out how the planning system has a key role to play in rebuilding the Country's economy, and the steps the Government expects local planning authorities to take with immediate effect. The Statement confirms the Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. In doing so, it confirms the local planning authorities should make every effort to identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs of their areas, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth.
- 1.1.7 The advent of the Localism Act and the NPPF is to shift authority and responsibility to local authorities and local communities to consider their development needs. The NPPF requires Local Plans to deliver strategic policies including, inter alia, the homes and jobs needed in the area.⁶ Therefore the new planning system created by statute and national policy, places the responsibility for accommodating needs on the Local Planning Authority.
- 1.1.8 The implications of the revocation of the Regional Strategies must be seen in that context: the District Council has a duty to co-operate with its neighbouring authorities and must objectively assess needs for development in deriving the strategic policies to achieve growth and Sustainable Development. Whilst the Government's intention to abolish Regional Strategies is clear and legal provision has been made to enable this (subject to regulations by the Secretary of State and SEA)⁷, the abolition of Regional Strategies is yet to take place and at the present time they remain part of the Development Plan for the purposes of Section 38(6).

⁵ NPPF Paragraph 47

⁶ NPPF Paragraph 156

⁷ Section 109 of the Localism Act 2011

1.1.9 In the South West, the emerging RS did not reach adoption following the EIP in 2007. However, the evidence base formulated and tested at the EIP led to the objectively considered level of new homes of 5,150 in Purbeck in the period 2006-26. In response to the decision by PDC to identify only 2,400 homes distributed across the district (leaving out the Western Sector 2,750 homes and not seeking to redistribute this elsewhere), the former Government Office for the South West⁸ advised strongly in their letter dated 23rd November 2009 that

“it would seem questionable whether this conclusion is justified as it lumps different functional areas together and thus ignores the housing need arising in the SSCT in addition to that of the rural area’ needs...you should at least consider what contribution Purbeck can make...you cannot simply ignore Purbeck’s part in meeting the SE Dorset’s SSCT’s housing needs.”

1.1.10 Firmly at the heart of Government policy is the need to support growth and investment in our communities. The Purbeck Community Plan confirms that at the grassroots level local people recognise that affordable housing is one of the top issues needing attention in Purbeck. The main priorities for action are defined to include affordable homes, homes for young people and older people⁹. PDC has failed to justify adequately why it is not addressing the evidence of housing need in the District, thereby is not sound as it is not positively prepared to meet objectively assessed development requirements. Moreover, it is not justified as the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives, including the provision of higher growth which can be satisfactorily accommodated at Wareham in order to address the functional status of Wareham as a service centre, market town and the main administrative centre of the District. The Core Strategy is not consistent with national policy in the NPPF as it fails to deliver homes needed in the area.

Issue 1.2: In general terms is the overall spatial strategy based on a sound assessment of the socio-economic and environmental characteristics of the area and are the impacts of the proposals properly addressed?

1.2.1 For the reasons set out in response to Issue 1.1, it is not considered that the overall spatial strategy is based on a sound assessment of the socio-economic characteristics in that it fails to deliver the level of growth required to serve locally identified needs. This matter is further addressed in Issue 1.4 below. The impacts of the proposals are not properly addressed in terms of SANG required to ensure adequate avoidance measures are in place in respect of proposed housing allocations in order to address

⁸ CD100

⁹ CD68 section 6.2 on page 11

the Habitats Regulations. This matter is dealt with in further detail in relation to Issue 14.4 in Matter 14.

Issue 1.3: Is the DPD based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal and testing of reasonable alternatives, and does it represent the most appropriate strategy in the circumstances? Has the site selection process been objective and based on appropriate criteria? Is there too much reliance on the preparation of 'subsequent plans' and should such references be more specific? Are such plans identified in the Local Development Scheme?

1.3.1 Concern is raised regarding the soundness and robustness of the consideration of reasonable alternatives and of the soundness of the SA in light of its reliance on an assumed adverse impact on protected species resulting from additional housing growth. Paragraph's 6.13 and 6.14 of the Draft Core Strategy refer to additional work to investigate higher level growth, including testing alternative strategic growth proposals against the Habitats Regulations. It is our view that the Core Strategy has not adequately assessed reasonable alternatives and has without proper justification rejected an alternative strategy for strategic development at West Wareham in association with a strategic SANG.

1.3.2 Footprint Ecology¹⁰ has examined five growth options including land to the west of Wareham at Worgret Manor, promoted by Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd capable of accommodating at least 500 homes. The scale of the opportunity for SANG and associated habitat enhancements including new access arrangements at Worgret Manor Farm is very large. In total the land available at Worgret Manor Farm extends to around 125ha.

1.3.3 Even allowing for the eventual development of up to 35 ha near the bypass, there would be at least 90 ha to be used as strategic SANG, incorporating significant opportunities for habitat enhancements and nature conservation education.

1.3.4 Furthermore, the scale of the potential SANG allows a proper strategic examination of the most useful level of development west of Wareham. Assuming a similar ratio to that used in the Thames Basin heaths, of a notional minimum 8ha of SANG per 1000 new residents, a SANG with an area of 90 ha, providing walks of up to 7.5 km, could theoretically support recreational use by an additional population of up to 11,250 new residents. Utilising Natural England's household occupancy ratio of 2.4, this would accommodate for the development of up to 4,687 new dwellings which by far exceeds the maximum number of dwellings considered at Wareham within the Core Strategy. It

¹⁰ CD112

is clear that the size of the Frome Valley SANG is unlikely to be a constraint on the westward growth of Wareham.

- 1.3.5 The Footprint Ecology report¹¹ states that detailed consideration of the area immediately around Wareham would seem to indicate there is little potential for an effective SANG. They state that given the attractiveness of local heaths any SANG:

“would need to be very large, carefully designed and attractive, with a rural and ‘wilderness’ feel, in order to draw visitors. The assessment of plans prepared by Ashvilla Estates in 2006 for a 36ha SANG (rather than the SANG of up to 90ha now proposed) refers to the site as fragmented by the railway, influenced by roads and that the land is currently “relatively unattractive arable land.”

The assessment seeks to examine and predict visitor effects on existing heaths but does so without having regard to mitigation associated with the additional growth options.

- 1.3.6 The Review of Habitat Regulations Assessments Undertaken for Purbeck District Council and Comments on Potential for, and effectiveness of, SANG at Worgret Manor Farm in Wareham, submitted as part of our representations responds in detail to the Footprint Ecology report, and concludes that the Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Core Strategy recognises the scale of the SANG requirement, but does not appear to have properly examined the potential of a Frome Valley SANG on land west of Wareham.

- 1.3.7 A strategic SANG immediately to the west of Wareham is required to be included in the plan in order to make the Core Strategy sound and to ensure compliance with the legal requirements of the Habitats Regulations. The site selection process at Wareham has not been objective in that land West of Wareham (as one of the higher growth options) has been summarily discounted primarily on the basis of the Footprint report. Indeed CD31 Paragraph 4.2.3 confirms with reference to CD112 why the Council has not adopted a higher growth option. Paragraph 5.4 states that:

“Whilst 2,520 dwellings are well below the ONS projections and do not meet all the housing needs of the 2,029 households on the housing register, there are serious concerns that a higher level of growth could have an adverse effect on protected habitats.” (our emphasis)

- 1.3.8 The Sustainability Appraisal (SD15) states that:

¹¹ CD112 Paragraphs 2.68 & 2.69

“The housing target for Purbeck falls short of meeting future housing needs as indicated by the government household projections and falls short of meeting current needs indicated on the housing register. Constraints posed by European protected habitats and species and transport infrastructure severely restrict the amount of housing development that is deliverable¹².”

1.3.9 The SA goes on to state that whilst there will be potentially significant beneficial effects in the increase in the provision of affordable housing to meet local needs, there will also be potentially significant negative effects in the increasing demand for property in Purbeck coupled with reduced supply forcing house prices higher and reducing affordability further.¹³ Appendix 5 (SD15e) provides an assessment of the alternative housing growth option of up to 5,150 homes. It clarifies that additional growth in central Purbeck has been discounted due to impacts on protected species. The matrix compares the alternative policy (HS5150) to the draft Core Strategy Policy HS and the alternative policy scores or is likely to score the same as HS in all areas save three. There are considered to be greater negative impacts on protected species and landscape/townscape (impact on the setting of towns due to accommodating more significant growth) and a more positive effect in terms of making suitable housing available and affordable for everyone. The latter conclusion is not surprising.

1.3.10 However, the SA states in relation to HS5150 and protected species that **“There is no evidence to show that growth over 2,520 dwellings can be successfully mitigated.”** This statement is made in spite of the fact that at the Pre-Submission Consultation Stage no SANG to serve proposed development at Wareham had been included in the Core Strategy and subsequently in light of Ashvilla Estates (Wareham) Ltd concerns raised regarding the efficacy of the Stoborough SANG to serve the Worgret Road allocation for 200 homes. Furthermore, it is a startling conclusion to reach given the proposed Swanage allocations/settlement extensions have yet to be determined and the SANG to be defined accordingly. The conclusions of the SA cannot be considered robust in that it places reliance on the Footprint Ecology report¹⁴ in discounting higher levels of housing growth in the District, particularly at West Wareham, despite the evidence of a strategic SANG at Worgret Manor which could serve significantly higher levels of growth in Central Purbeck. Given the significance of the effect of development on the Dorset Heaths SPA, strategic development should be allocated in the Core Strategy, not left to a subsequent DPD. Moreover, we are

¹² SD15 pages 73 and 74

¹³ SD15 page 74

¹⁴ CD112

concerned that the SANG strategy set out in the Core Strategy for Wareham and Swanage is either flawed or absent.

Issue 1.4: In broad terms is the quantum of development proposed for housing, employment and retail properly justified? Is it deliverable over the timescales proposed?

1.4.1 In respect of housing, the quantum of development is not properly justified. Minor Change 10¹⁵ confirms that the average income in Purbeck is 9% lower and average house prices are 19.4% higher than national figures, leaving the average house price of £288,439 over 12 times the average median wage £23,738.¹⁶ PDC¹⁷ sets out five main challenges facing the District. These include providing housing people can afford, protecting and enhancing the environment, relieving congestion on the A351, improving employment opportunities and helping people access services and community facilities.¹⁸

1.4.2 The 2008 based ONS sub-national population forecasts for Purbeck over the period 2008-33 indicate a 13% growth in population. The Housing Needs Survey (CD111) identified that in 2006 there was an annual need for 417 affordable homes, with a shortfall of 349 units per annum. The SHMA 2011 update report for Purbeck confirms that in the period 2007-11 there were only 650 new homes provided in the District (163pa) and only 21% of these as affordable homes (136 or 34pa)¹⁹. Taking account of income and estimates of household savings and equity it is estimated that 25.3% (1 in 4) of all households in Purbeck cannot afford housing at current market prices/rents without reliance on subsidy²⁰. In terms of affordable housing need, there is an annual need to provide 520 additional affordable homes per annum. Household growth is predicted to rise by 3,396 households in the period 2011-31 – a 17% increase with an annual average increase of 170 households: some 50 more than total new homes provided for by the Core Strategy: alternatively put, the Draft Core Strategy will only deliver 70% of the housing just to satisfy projected household growth. CD120b provides a helpful comparison between the 2008 and 2011 SHMA reports and concludes that:

“...the message is clear that housing is highly unaffordable to a large number of local people, despite the downturn in property values. The 2011 update shows the problem is

¹⁵ SD26 page 3

¹⁶ CD27 paragraph 2.4.1

¹⁷ Purbeck District Council

¹⁸ CD27 paragraph 2.10.1

¹⁹ CD120a Figure 2.2

²⁰ CD120a Paragraph 4.6

getting worse, as demand for affordable housing is far outstripping supply.”

1.4.3 We recommend that further settlement extensions are identified within the Core Strategy which can deliver housing in the early part of the plan period, in order to meet social and housing needs, sustain rural communities and provide for a balanced, measurable and deliverable pattern of sustainable growth, focussed on existing settlements such as Wareham and Swanage, key public transport corridors and ensuring the jobs to homes balance is retained, to achieve sustainable social and economic growth as well as the protection of environmental constraints.

1.4.4 Whilst the low level of growth in the draft Core Strategy is likely to be capable of delivery, uncertainties remain regarding the high reliance on windfalls and that the Swanage allocations are to be made under a future DPD.

Issue 1.5: What are the main risks to delivery; does the Council have an appropriate fall-back position; and is there sufficient flexibility to accommodate any unforeseen circumstances? What are the triggers for a review of the document?

1.5.1 Notwithstanding the fundamental concern that the Core Strategy will fail to secure delivery of housing to meet identified needs and population growth projections, the main risks to delivery include the reliance on windfall sites from the character area potential work, the fact that the SANG strategy for the Worgret Road settlement extension of 200 homes is not acceptable in terms of the Habitats Regulations, and that the allocation(s) of 200 dwellings for Swanage are not defined by the Core Strategy but are left to a subsequent plan. There is no identified fallback position given the Council's rejection of other strategic options for development.