

**West Dorset District Council**

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Mr Paul Crysell, Inspector
c/o Mrs Christine Self

**Spatial & Community Policy Manager
Hilary Jordan**

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Our Ref:

Date: 24 July 2013

Dear Mr Crysell,

Inspector's Initial Questions to Councils, 19 July 2013

Thank you for your letter of 19 July and I shall go through your points in order. I shall also cover the issues raised in the letter of 18 July from Sarah Hamilton-Foyn of Pegasus Group.

To begin with the chronology, your summary of the stages of consultation is correct. The only comments I would add are that the changes made at the Policy Scrutiny Committee meeting of 13 May also included the further reduction in size of the allocation at Crossways (CRS1), and that the Policy Scrutiny Committee decision was subsequently ratified by both Executive Committee and full Council.

Turning therefore to your three specific questions arising from this:

(1) Further consultation

We have considered this and would be content to publish the changes now for consultation (for six weeks from early August through to mid September). Options would be either:

- i. To undertake consultation on the proposed housing allocation changes in West Dorset only (ie confirming that SE Dorchester and Hollymoor Lane are excluded, that the Crossways allocation is reduced further, and that the new policy section on land supply at the end of the plan period is to be added); or
- ii. To undertake consultation on all the changes proposed to be made to the June/July plan (which would otherwise be consulted on only after the hearings, as part of the main modifications consultation).

While your letter suggests the former option, we have some preference for the latter, to ensure that consultation has then taken place equally on all changes. This would also be based on an existing document and would avoid the need to prepare an additional consultation document.

(2) Policy SUS 1

The proposed separate Policy SUS1a has actually been inserted as a second clause of Policy SUS 1, so it appears as SUS1 (ii)

(3) Plan period

We did consider reducing the plan period as a result of the decision not to go ahead with the South East Dorchester allocation in West Dorset. There is however a complete land supply to 2031 in Weymouth & Portland (indeed an over-supply) and this council is keen to demonstrate certainty over its future growth proposals. As it is a joint plan, we concluded that we would retain the same plan period but undertake a focused review on meeting the housing needs for the later part of the plan period in West Dorset only. It should also be noted that as we have made only a conservative estimate of the delivery from neighbourhood plans, but are putting significant effort into encouraging them, this review would also be an opportunity to assess whether neighbourhood plans were likely to deliver the remaining requirement.

Other issues

(4) Green Infrastructure Strategy

Until the completion of the GI strategy, this policy will be used to prevent development which could be harmful to the existing GI network (as represented by the sites protected in the existing adopted local plans – the categories of which are listed in the plan text.) I appreciate that the policy and its text do imply that in the future, it will be used to protect an as-yet-undefined network of GI. Presumably this could be addressed by preparing the GI strategy (or a future policy document emerging from it) as a DPD, and this could be clarified within the text of the plan.

(5) Monitoring information: infrastructure

I am sure that we could provide further detail within Chapter 6 of the main infrastructure requirements and responsibilities. We will consider some appropriate wording and send this through to you.

(6) Gypsy and Traveller site policy

The intention is that in the interim period, before the separate traveller site DPD is adopted, we will assess proposals on the basis of national policy. This was the approach agreed through the examination of the Purbeck local plan (also within the county area) and with the other participants in the county-wide study. It was not considered that the local policy was adding anything further to that already stated in national policy, but of course if it is recommended that we take a different position then it can be reinstated.

(7) Sustainable Community Strategies

The Sustainable Community Strategies are the Community Plans (West Dorset Community Plan / Weymouth & Portland Community Plan, plus the Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy). These were all prepared by the relevant Partnerships. The background papers all go through the content of these plans and how they have informed the development of the plan policies: this is also covered in the Sustainability Appraisal. The Community Partnerships have also been involved in all the consultations on the plan.

(8) Key diagram

We have prepared and sent through a larger key diagram, and will prepare a further one if there are additional things it would be useful to show on it.

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(9) Environmental Constraints

We believe that these have been taken fully into account when assessing the development options and that this is reflected in the Sustainable Pattern of Development chapter; the Environment chapter; and in the policies and supporting text to each of the land allocations. Further material is included in the background papers and Sustainability Appraisal (as well as in some of the evidence base documents) and should additional text or policy sections be recommended in the plan itself to make this clearer, we will take these on board.

In terms of mitigation strategies, these include:

- For development potentially affecting the Dorset Heathlands, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace will be sought as part of the development proposal in the case of the larger sites (eg the SANG land proposed in connection with the Crossways development). For infill sites, financial contributions will be taken through CIL that will be spent on the provision of SANG or management of access to protected heathlands.
- For development in the Poole Harbour catchment, the position is that we would require development to be nutrient-neutral. This can be achieved either through improvements made at sewage treatment works, or through taking agricultural land in the catchment out of production, so as to reduce the nutrient levels by an equivalent amount as to make up for the increase from the development.
- For development proposals affecting the natural beauty of the AONB, mitigation appropriate for each of the identified sites has been considered and reflected in the policy wording. The scope for mitigation was a factor in deciding on where development might be acceptable in the AONB, and in some cases such as Littlemoor there is considered to be some potential for enhancement.

Additional text was included in the modifications to explain the justification for development taking place in the AONB. This is at paragraph 3.3.6 (in the Sustainable Pattern of Development chapter) of the amended Plan.

(10) Supplementary Planning Documents

We are envisaging that the Coastal Change Management SPD would support and provide more detail to existing policy. The areas likely to become CCMA's are highlighted through the SMP, and existing policies on avoiding development in areas at risk of land instability are currently applied to these areas, so the SPD would not be fundamentally changing the policy approach. If the definition of the boundaries of these areas is considered something that cannot be done through an SPD, then this would be done as a DPD. We are however anxious to progress the local plan and bringing forward the main development allocations, and did not want to delay this by the time it would have taken to undertake all the work required to include defined CCMA's, and the full GI network, in the plan at this stage.

(11) Consultation databases

We are currently assisting the Programme Officer with this process and will undertake further work on this as required, though we recognise that there will be some implications for the programme due to the number of representations and therefore scale of work that may be needed.

(12) Additional matters

We have recently noticed an error which we would like to draw to your attention: in paragraph 6.2.3 of the tracked-changes version of the plan, (setting out the major sites on which section 106 agreements rather than CIL are likely to be used), the list of sites still includes south-east Dorchester. This is an error and should be deleted.

Matters raised in the correspondence from Pegasus Group

As set out above, we propose to carry out additional consultation now, as recommended, and consider that this will address the concerns raised. We took Counsel opinion ourselves concerning the decision to submit the plan as amended by the Policy Scrutiny Committee. Conclusions were:

- Potential objectors' concerns could be addressed through the examination process and they would not be prejudiced as a result of not having been consulted on the changes beforehand
- Regulations 19 and 20 are not prescriptive and the council's interpretation is reasonable
- We are trying to follow the Government's emphasis on adopting a plan as quickly as possible so as to provide certainty over the future direction of growth. Further consultation prior to submission would have led to a significant delay (partly due to the number of committee and council meetings that we would have had to go through). We also have forthcoming planning appeals and consider that a plan that has moved forwards to submission and towards the examination provides clearer guidance for these decisions.

In terms of the documents referred to:

- The historic landscape assessment document and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments were undertaken in direct response to objections made during the 2013 consultation, from statutory consultees, which clearly recommended that the 'Alternative Strategy' would be likely to be found unsound without additional work on these matters. There will be the opportunity to comment on it through the examination process.
- The revised housing needs information was commissioned in order to take account of the new evidence in the form of the interim household projections – not in order to justify lower housing numbers but to make sure we were responding to the most up to date evidence. The requirements that we are committed to meeting are not significantly lower (even at the lower end of the range throughout the period, the difference is only 15 per annum, or 300 homes in total, and at the higher end the plan would now be proposing 240 more than in the 2012 pre-submission draft). We have recognised that there is still a need for additional provision at the end of the plan period and are committed to meeting this. It should be noted that the 2012 pre-submission plan also had a shortfall at the end of the plan period (albeit of a smaller amount) and objectors have therefore had the opportunity to make representations around the principle of this issue.
- It is our understanding that the evidence base must be completed by the time of submission: there is no requirement that the evidence base be subject to consultation. Clearly there will be opportunities for any differences in opinion about matters arising from this evidence, during the course of the examination process and during the forthcoming additional consultation.

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In relation to the Sustainability Appraisal, Oliver Rendle who was responsible for its preparation is giving these points some more consideration and we will prepare a more detailed response to you early next week. In terms of consistency of scoring, however, the SA was an iterative process alongside the local plan, and took account of changes in the wording of policies that was taking place through the local plan preparation. The way that a site was scored during the original assessment of potential sites may well have changed as a result of amendments that had been made to the policy following consultation (such as the addition of mitigation proposals).

We will provide the additional text on monitoring infrastructure provision as soon as possible, and will let you know of any further issues as they arise. We would however welcome your view on our preference to undertake consultation on the full set of changes to the plan, as we would like to start this very shortly.

Please let us know if you would like further clarification on these or any other matters.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary Jordan
Spatial & Community Policy Manager