

## West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan EiP

### Position statement made by Smiths Gore on behalf of the Salisbury Diocese Board of Finance.

#### Matter 9: Peripheral Weymouth Localities – Policy 10

##### 9.1 Does LITT 1 offer the best opportunity for accommodating future development needs and has the need to develop in the AONB been fully justified in accordance with the NPPF?

- The Littlemoor Urban Extension (LUE) falls entirely within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and so a decision to allocate land for development here should not be undertaken lightly. In fact the local planning authority has a duty to have due regard for the primary purpose of the AONB when making planning decisions which affect them. Under national planning policy, as set out in paragraph 115 of the Framework, the government explains that "*great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in...Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty*". Paragraph 116 of the Framework goes on to provide important guidance in relation to how major developments in these areas should be considered by local planning authorities:

Para 116: "*Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
  - *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside of the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
  - *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."*
- The LUE is a major development project. As such the scope of development proposed in this area should only be supported in "**exceptional circumstances**". In order to qualify as an exceptional circumstance the local planning authority would first need to demonstrate that there are no other more suitable locations, either within or outside of the AONB, where development can come forward to meet the area's development needs. Such a conclusion could only be drawn following a thorough assessment of all possible sites where development could potentially be provided and ruling these sites out on robust and defensible grounds.
  - In the eight year period since the LUE was conceived the context for the urban extension has changed dramatically with the revocation of regional strategies, followed by the decision to reduce the number of dwellings required over the coming plan period and of course the completion of the Weymouth Relief Road. All of these factors have had a profound impact upon what the most appropriate location for the urban extension might be, its size and the mixture of uses to be provided.
  - Given the extent of the Dorset AONB the Salisbury Diocese accepts that it may be an impossible task to entirely satisfy the needs of the district without releasing at least

some of the land within it for development. Furthermore given the introduction of the new Weymouth Relief Road it is inevitable that future development will take place in this broad location due to significant improvements in accessibility. This should not however suggest that all AONB land is up for grabs but rather mean that the selection criteria used in the allocation of sites becomes all the more important. It stands to reason that there are varying degrees of landscape beauty within the AONB and this should be a fundamental consideration to ensure that landscape harm is minimised as far as possible.

- In order to be found sound the local planning authorities must be able to demonstrate that the Local Plan is deliverable over the plan period. With regards to the proposed LUE no reassurance can be given to suggest that it can be delivered within the required timescales.
- One of the most concerning factors is that, thus far, very little is known about what form the proposed urban extension will take as no detailed masterplanning process has been undertaken to date. It is also significant to note that the proposed number of homes to be delivered on this site has been substantially reduced from 700 to 500 and now there appears to be no overall target. This will inevitably have serious implications in terms of the site's ability to deliver the required levels of employment development and community infrastructure to support the LUE. Without a clear understanding of the number of dwellings that will be delivered at the site there can be no certainty that the site will be able to viably deliver the necessary levels of infrastructure required. Given the highly constrained nature of the LUE within the AONB and on sloping ground, it is likely that significant landscaping and mitigation will be required which will further reduce the viability of the scheme.
- With the significant costs associated with the development and the lack of any clear masterplan illustrating what form the urban extension might take, there is very little reassurance that sufficient development can actually be delivered in the short to medium term.
- These concerns are further compounded by the fact that better serviced and related land which lies outside of the AONB and would have a lesser landscape impact has been overlooked (see appendix 1).
- The Littlemoor area of search initially included the area immediately adjacent to the urban edge of Upwey, part of which is in the ownership of the Salisbury Diocese. While this land has been disregarded within the proposed LUE no justification has been provided for why this is the case. This is particularly surprising as the site clearly presents a more sustainable location for development.
- The land north east of Upwey, between Dorchester Road and Icen Lane represents an obvious area in which to focus future development, not least because it does not fall entirely within the defined AONB. Conversely the whole of the proposed Littlemoor Urban Extension is located inside of the AONB (see fig 1).

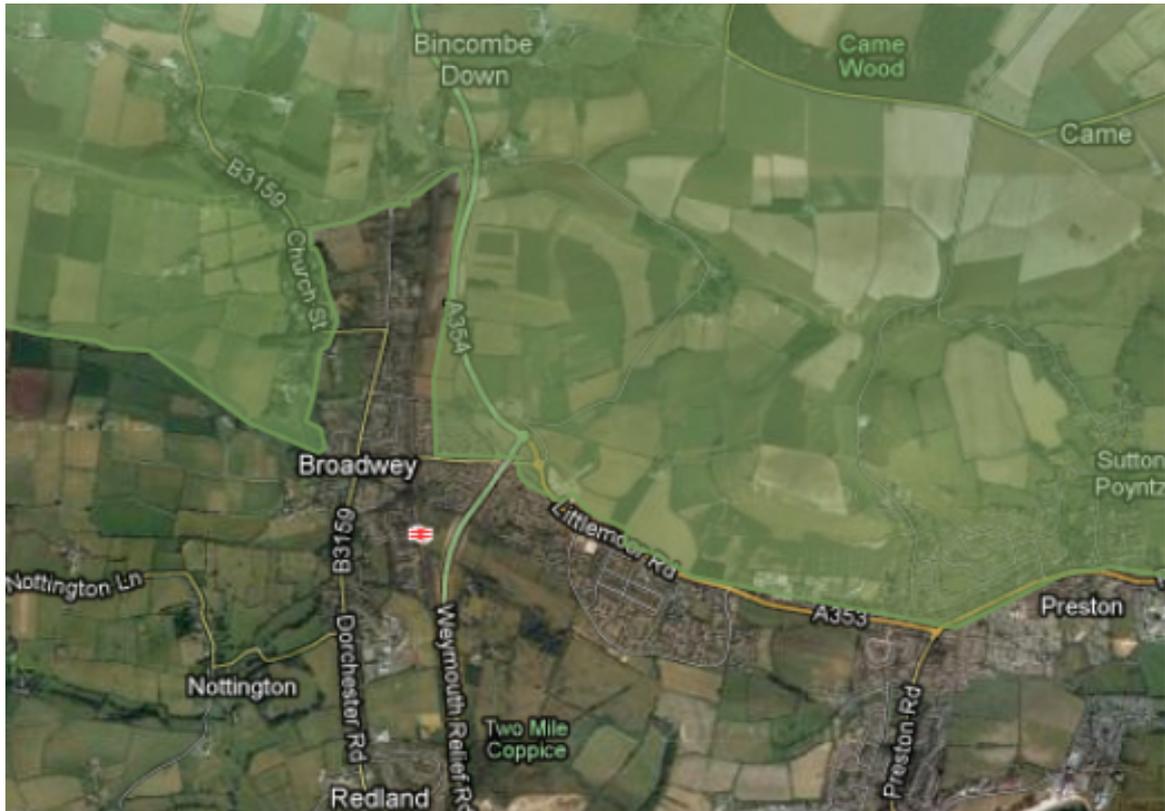


Fig 1: Extent of the Dorset AONB (Dorset AONB Partnership website, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 2014)

- Although historically the development boundary for Upwey was defined by the route of the railway line, the settlement expanded beyond this physical boundary during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As such the precedent for development beyond the railway line has already been set. It is also important to note that the local context has changed significantly in recent years following the completion of the Weymouth Relief Road. This has left a large area of land between the new road and the railway line within which development can be provided. While it is recognised that the relief road has been set down from ground level in order to reduce the visual impact there is no denying that its introduction has significantly compromised the landscape setting and tranquillity of this area. Surely therefore it will be far less damaging to direct future development in the area between Upwey and the new road, where the quality of the landscape has already been compromised, rather than extending beyond the road and out into the open countryside.
- Furthermore a strong case can be presented that the land north of Upwey actually represents a more deliverable development option than the approach currently favoured by the local authority.
- Policy LITT 1 criterion ii) explains that the site will be developed in accordance with a masterplan prepared jointly by West Dorset District Council, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and the local community. As mentioned above we therefore have no idea at this stage what form development might take in the proposed urban extension. Furthermore we would suggest it is inevitable that an urban extension comprising a currently unknown number of dwellings and 15 hectares of employment land entirely within the AONB, which closes the remaining gap between two rural settlements and which extends outwards into the open countryside, will receive vehement objections from the local community, particularly from the residents of Littlemoor. This has the potential to significantly delay the

delivery of the development and could vastly reduce the overall quantum of development.

- Conversely a development on the land north east of Upwey would be far less controversial among local people. While the site is bound to the south and west by existing development it is not actually directly overlooked by local residents. This is because development to the west is separated by the presence of the railway line and the properties to the south do not front directly on to Icen Lane. In fact there is an excellent opportunity to deliver genuine benefits to the local community through improvements to the existing road network, particularly along Icen Lane and Chapel Lane, and by providing links through to Nightingale Drive to the south.
- In order to aid the integration of the Littlemoor Urban Extension, policy LITT 1 requires the development to provide an extension to the existing Littlemoor Centre which will need to be provided at the expense of the developer. This has the potential to impact upon the viability of the overall scheme. Such expense would not be necessary if development were to be directed towards the land north east of Upwey. Through appropriate design a new housing scheme on this site can be easily integrated with the existing built form of Upwey and will provide excellent access to (and indeed support) the local services and facilities that the settlement already provides including the local food shop, schools, and the bus and train services.
- On the basis of the case presented in this response it is proposed that the Littlemoor Urban Extension should be completely reconsidered as it is not the most sustainable location for future development to take place. Instead it is recommended that the land to the north east of Upwey, between Dorchester Road and Icen Lane, should be included within the allocation at LITT 1. A substantial proportion of the housing allocation currently proposed for the urban extension should instead be provided on this land which has the capacity to accommodate development without causing harm to the wider landscape setting. This would allow for a significant reduction in the amount of development to be provided to the north of Littlemoor, thus reducing the resulting harm to the AONB and preventing the coalescence of Preston and Littlemoor.

### Appendix 1 - Land north east of Upwey, between Dorchester Road and Icen Lane.

