

**EXAMINATION OF THE MILTON ABBAS NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
(DORSET COUNCIL)**

**Examiner's Questions – 20 April 2020**

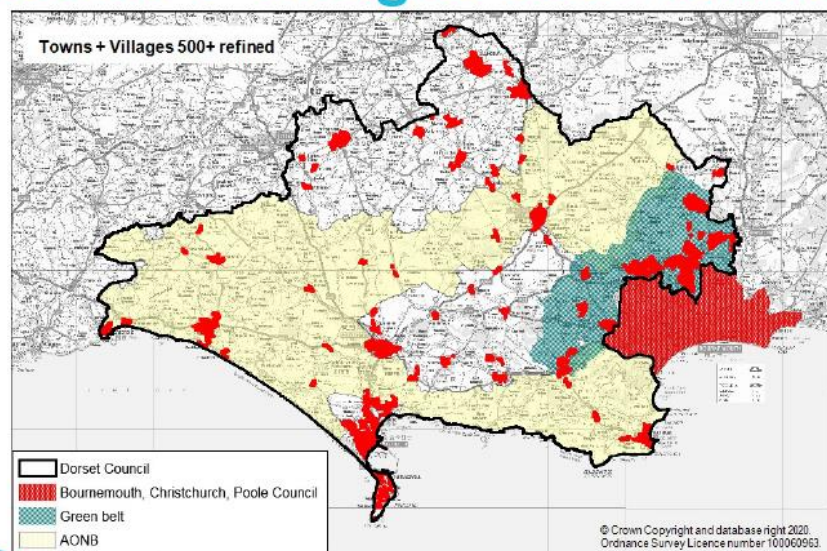
**Response agreed at the Milton Abbas Parish Council meeting 11 May 2020**

**EQ1.** Messrs Gleeson say that past completions should not be used to reduce the housing requirement, principally because the planning exercise (including public consultation) takes 2020 as the starting-point. In addition, they say that no allowance should be made for the conversion of existing buildings (table 1 of the Plan). Do you have any response to this?  
(Addressed to DC and MAPC)

*The Neighbourhood Plan Group prepared the Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) with support from Jo Witherden BSc(Hons) DipTP DipUD MRTPI of Dorset Planning Consultant Limited, and (the former) North Dorset District Council. It follows the guidance produced by AECOM for Locality on Housing Needs Assessment at Neighbourhood Plan Level<sup>1</sup>. This guidance includes dwellings completions in the assessment of market factors.*

*The HNA takes the current 'derived' target from the adopted Local Plan as the starting point, which is based on the 20 year period 2011-2031. The assessment of housing need for a Neighbourhood Plan Area is not the same as for a Local Plan, there are no national population projections for Neighbourhood Plan areas, which by their very nature are much more limited in their extent than Local Plan areas. The spatial strategy for the area as set in the Local Plan is a key consideration. Indeed whilst Milton Abbas is identified as a 'larger village' in the adopted Local Plan, initial discussions with Town and Parish Councils (at an event held in Dorchester in February 2020) in respect of the emerging Dorset Local Plan would suggest that, due to the poor transport accessibility of the area, a 'refined' approach may downgrade Milton Abbas in the settlement hierarchy (suggesting that it would no longer be a focus for rural needs). It is anticipated that this refined approach may be subject to wider consultation later this year.*

## Towns + Villages 500+ refined



<sup>1</sup> <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/undertake-housing-needs-assessment-hna/>

*The HNA however did look at various other factors including the appropriate uplift (for example as suggested by the now abandoned North Dorset Local Plan review, as well as that derived from applying the NPPG standard methodology). When these were applied, they were applied to 2011-2031 (and therefore would have had a greater uplift than had they been applied to the plan period).*

*As a number of the projections are based starting with the 20 year period 2011-2031, some adjustment is obviously necessary to refine this to the proposed plan period (from 2018). This could either be done by calculating an annual target from the 20 year period, or taking into account completions. Taking completions into account was considered to be more reflective of the reality on the ground. The same approach is reflected in a number of other Neighbourhood Plans that have been examined and made in North Dorset.*

*Gleeson argue that completions that are recorded as certificate of lawful use applications, have not led to an increase in dwellings, and therefore should not be used. However to take this approach would be to deviate from the approach used in the other North Dorset Neighbourhood Plans which have been supported by the Council, and in our understanding would also deviate from how the Local Planning Authority calculate its housing completions. Furthermore, to suggest an agricultural workers dwelling should not be counted because it “does not meet the general housing need of the village” appears ludicrous, as the HNA figure is for the parish (not the village alone) and is specifically to house a worker employed in a local business (part of the local economy) and therefore clearly a local need.*

*In any event, even if 1.2dpa (the ‘annual’ share of the 2011-2031 figure of 24 for Milton Abbas as shown in Table 2 of the HNA) had simply been multiplied by the plan period suggested by Gleeson (2020 – 2031) this would have generated a figure of  $1.2 \times 11 = 13$ . Applying the ‘largest’ uplift of 28.4% (from section 2.2 of the HNA) to this figure gives 16 - 17 dwellings, which is fewer than the target of 20 dwellings which the plan proposes.*

*The plan period is a matter for the Parish Council to specify and it is not prescribed in any guidance or legislation that this should take the date of the plan’s submission as the starting point. There is no reason for this to be changed to 2020, and the Parish Council considers that the plan was first drafted and subject to its pre-submission consultation (2019) is a sensible one.*

*In terms of the allowance for conversions, it is clear from past applications that this has formed a continuous source of housing, and there is evidence from the Call for Sites and Site Assessment report that additional sites are possible. There is evidence of 6 sites potentially suitable for conversions / windfall development with a potential supply of 9 dwellings on pg ii and 7 of the AECOM report. This supply was discounted to 4 dwellings – a reasonable estimate allowing for the fact that not all of the sites may come forward despite clear landowner interest. This is considered to meet the ‘compelling evidence’ requirements for windfall assessment set out in national guidance <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment#method--stage-3-windfall-assessment-where-justified>.*

*The figure of “at least 30 dwellings and up to 74 dwellings” proposed by Gleeson is based on a single HNA (Okeford Fitzpaine) in North Dorset that has not been examined or ratified by the Local Planning Authority and which took no account of the spatial strategy for the area. Whereas the figure proposed by Milton Abbas Parish Council is based on an approach taken in*

*numerous made Neighbourhood Plans in the North Dorset area which have been independently examined, and ratified by the Local Planning Authority.*

**EQ2.** I am aware that the former North Dorset District Council at some point accepted the continuing need for flexibility in considering the housing situation, due to the absence of a 5-year supply. Is that something which is also now the present position of Dorset Council?  
(Addressed to DC)

*Refer to Dorset Council response*

**EQ3.** Gleeson say that the original proposals for site 6 were modified in response to concerns by the AONB team, rather than dropped entirely, and they consider it inconsistent that the same approach was not adopted in relation to site 7, which had attracted similar objections. May I have a comment? (Addressed to MAPC)

*Site 7 was first assessed by AECOM in its entirety (3.45ha as reflected in the Site Assessment report pg 37). The AECOM assessment suggested that “the western section of the site is considered potentially suitable due to its proximity to the road network and to residential properties within the settlement” and that promoting the entire site was “unlikely to be appropriate given the scale of the site, its location within the AONB and potential impacts on villagescape”.*

*As such, the site was modified in response to these concerns, and only the western section of the site was put forward as an option in the February 2019 consultation and subsequently assessed in the SEA Environmental Report. For example, on pg 22 of the SEA under landscape impacts, the appraisal makes clear that “The development of the entire area of site 7 would constitute major development in the AONB and could also significantly change the character of the existing village, and therefore only part of the site fronting onto the road should be considered for development in order to avoid significant harm (and has been assessed on this basis), although some minor harm is still considered likely.”*

*Whilst the AONB team did not comment specifically on the omission sites (ie the western area of the site), they did object to planning application 2/2019/0824/OUT in July 2019 which at that time was for up to 58 dwellings but has now been amended to up to 30 dwellings. This raised strong objections not limited to the area to the east of the site as report in the SEA addendum.*

*Whilst the AONB’s response to the amended scheme for 30 dwellings has yet to be published, as recorded in the SEA addendum (para 8.6) “The AONB representative indicated at the site meeting that they would be unlikely to support a reduced scheme in this location.”*

*The Conservation Officer (who also raised objections) has responded to the 30 dwelling scheme as follows:*

*“CONSERVATION OFFICER Further COMMENTS*

*COMMENTS*

- There have been some amendments to the scheme in terms of the form of some of the dwellings, now stated as bungalows, also the number of proposed dwellings reduced and the “pulling back “ of the boundary closest to the access drive to Milton Manor, to try and mitigate*

*the encroachment on the access drive to the listed Milton Manor, which is such a threat to the existing separation of the village from the Grade II heritage asset and route to the SAM.*

*However, the following points raised in the previous comments still stand:*

- The importance of the existing dense, uninterrupted eastern hedgeline, which contributes a strong feature within the streetscene and qualities of this AONB.*
- Despite C20 development having been introduced, it has remained characteristically is to the western side of the lane wrapping around behind the main settlement within the angle formed by the two main valleys in which the village sits. This retains this “through” route as a relatively undeveloped defining perimeter between village and countryside.*
- Development within this area of the village has primarily occurred in a phased manner with a varied design approach over the decades. However it has managed to maintain a relative low density appearance that has predominantly been arranged along linear (and established) routes, set back behind front gardens, which is contrary to the far denser and more organic “estate” with its associated new infrastructure.*
- The AONB, which covers this paddock site is the highest level of landscape protection and aims to conserve the undeveloped character, relative remoteness and dark skies of the village context. This will be substantially eroded by a scheme that is unsympathetic to this historic landscape and edge of village setting.*
- The approach on this lane provides the transition between rural and semi-rural and with it defines the experience of the gateway into the Conservation Area. The access road scheme will introduce a far more engineered suburban appearance to this relatively narrow semi-rural lane. As such, further objections to the proposed scheme still stand, as it is considered that the revisions still do not overcome the principle issues in regard to the less-than-substantial harm that will be contributed to the setting of the designated heritage assets due to layout, location, scale and design. Therefore officer support cannot be forthcoming.”*

**EQ4.** It would be helpful to have a response to Gleeson’s critique of the approach to the review of the settlement boundary (paragraphs 26-28 of their representation). *(Addressed to MAPC)*

*Para 26 of Gleeson’s report quotes directly from the Neighbourhood Plan, which includes the explanation of the changes made to the settlement boundary. Their main criticisms of this approach are dealt with in turn below:*

- Two allocations are proposed for inclusion in the settlement boundary, one is not*

*The difference in the approach is explained in the text that Gleeson quote – ie that Site 8 did not adjoin the existing boundary and it would not make sense to extend the settlement boundary arbitrarily to link to it, but its omission from the boundary is not considered to be an impediment to its allocation.*

- The more recent completed development at Damers Close is not included in the settlement boundary, which is odd and illogical*

*The reason for this is that the completed development at Damers Close was as a rural exception site for affordable housing. Our understanding is that this should continue to remain outside the settlement boundary in order that the reason for the site remaining affordable in perpetuity can be sustained. To include it in the settlement boundary could inadvertently encourage the*

*owners / occupants to apply for the affordable housing restriction to be lifted as this could be interpreted as being no longer necessary in policy terms.*

- *We question why the houses around and including New Close Cottages in the north of the village are not proposed for inclusion, or the Street itself.*

*The settlement boundaries in these locations (or lack of them) have been previously tested under the 2003 Local Plan when they were last examined (they were not examined closed in 2015 as at that time the LP had suggested removing all settlement boundaries). Whilst the Parish Council do not have access to the records from the 2003 examination, it is clear that, in respect of The Street, this is a highly sensitive area in which infill development would be likely to be deemed inappropriate, as clearly evidenced by the 2014 Article 4 direction removing permitted development rights under Part 1 Class A, E and F and Part 2 Class A and C <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/north-dorset/pdfs/article-4-direction-and-plan-milton-abbas.pdf>.*

*The dwellings at New Close Cottages were existence at the time of the 2003 plan, and none of the landowners responding to the call for sites suggested that they were looking to undertake infill development. As noted in the consultation statement (pg17), in response to the pre-submission consultation there was a late submission of a small plot of land in this location for consideration, but given the late stage in the plan's preparation it was not considered appropriate to include this site without further assessment and consultation, which would considerably delay the plan's adoption. It could, however, be considered through a future review of the plan, or brought forward in the meantime as an affordable housing rural exception site. This similarly applies to a settlement boundary revision in this location.*

**EQ5.** I would like a comment on Mr Burdett-Clark's objection to the inclusion of protection for viewpoint 6, which he says is not accessible to the public. *(Addressed to MAPC)*

*Mr Burdett-Clark made this same point in the pre-submission consultation and a response is made in the consultation statement on this matter (pg 22). There is a permissive footpath to Jane's Wood and the Parish Council have confirmed that it is their understanding of the deeds that all villagers have access to the path from which View 6 is shown. This has been detailed in the views assessment (as supporting evidence).*

**EQ6.** Gleeson say that the AECOM assessment of the screening of site 5 is based on a factual inaccuracy. May I have a comment? *(Addressed to MAPC)*

*This appears to be in respect of para 6.74 of the Neighbourhood Plan. It is accepted that the description is not as accurate as it could be, in that the hedgerow boundaries only existing to the south and east sides. However it is clear from the assessment material that the Parish Council did take into consideration the site's visibility from the north and east sides – indeed the following para 6.75 makes clear that "A landscape scheme will also be needed to provide a soft edge to the new settlement boundary, that reflects the character provided by the hedgerows and woodland areas within the area" and the policy itself reads that "A soft landscape planting scheme will be required along the northern and western sides to soften the visual impact of development from the bridleway (E15/1) and provide an overall biodiversity enhancement."*

*Similarly the SEA assessment considered the visual impact of site 5 in terms of the locally important view (i.e. 12b).*

*Having reviewed the entire text of 6.74, and in order to avoid any confusion, the Parish Council would like to suggest that the para 6.74 is amended to read as follows:*

*“6.74 This site is predominantly flat farmland located close to local services and facilities and is adjacent to an existing residential area. Milton Abbey Registered Park and Garden and a bridleway lie to the west, and like all the sites around the village, it lies within the boundaries of the Dorset AONB. It is not particularly constrained by ecological or heritage considerations. There are views across the site from the bridleway that lies to the west. The hedgerows/trees located along the eastern and southern site boundaries provide screening from the Blandford Road and properties to the south. Provided the site does not extend close to the bridleway to the west, and incorporates a new landscaped settlement edge, it is not expected that new development would significantly change the character of the surrounding landscape.”*

*David Kaiserman  
Independent Examiner*

**Response agreed at the Milton Abbas Parish Council meeting 11 May 2020**