



Dorset Council Local Plan Options Consultation

Background Paper – Flexible Settlement Policy
August 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. We are proposing a new approach for development at settlements in Dorset outside the Green Belt. This would see the removal of settlement or development boundaries around all of Dorset's settlements. We are proposing that they would be replaced by a new approach in the form of a 'flexible settlement' policy. This policy would be drafted to allow small-scale growth to occur incrementally around the edge of settlements. The policy would also include criteria which limit the scale of development and to ensure that we deliver high quality homes.

2. National policy and guidance

2.1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.1.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) sets out the government's planning policies for England.¹ While the NPPF should be read as a whole, the following extracts are considered particularly relevant to the justification and shaping of the Flexible Settlements Policy.
- 2.1.2. In terms of setting out the purpose of the planning system, Paragraph 7 states:
- The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.
- 2.1.3. Paragraph 10 states that “at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.” Paragraph 11 explains that for plan-making this means:
- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;
 - b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area (see footnote 7); or
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

¹ Available from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

2.1.4. In terms of policies in the NPPF that provide a strong reason for restricting development, footnote 7 lists the following:

- habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast;
- irreplaceable habitats;
- designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and
- areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

2.1.5. In terms of delivering a sufficient supply of homes, paragraphs 61 to 62 state:

61. To support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay. The overall aim should be to meet an area's identified housing need, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.

62. To determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning practice guidance. In addition to the local housing need figure, any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should also be taken into account in establishing the amount of housing to be planned for.

2.1.6. In terms of identifying land for homes, paragraphs 72, 73 and 75 state:

72. Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability. Planning policies should identify a supply of:

- a) specific, deliverable sites for five years following the intended date of adoption; and

- b) specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for the subsequent years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the remaining plan period.

73. Small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, are essential for Small and Medium Enterprise housebuilders to deliver new homes, and are often built out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites local planning authorities should:

- a) identify, through the development plan and brownfield registers, land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare; unless it can be shown, through the preparation of relevant plan policies, that there are strong reasons why this 10% target cannot be achieved;
- b) seek opportunities, through policies and decisions, to support small sites to come forward for community-led development for housing and self-build and custom-build housing;
- c) use tools such as area-wide design assessments, permission in principle and Local Development Orders to help bring small and medium sized sites forward;
- d) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes; and
- e) work with developers to encourage the sub-division of large sites where this could help to speed up the delivery of homes.

75. Where an allowance is to be made for windfall sites as part of anticipated supply, there should be compelling evidence that they will provide a reliable source of supply. Any allowance should be realistic having regard to the strategic housing land availability assessment, historic windfall delivery rates and expected future trends. Plans should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area.

2.1.7. In terms of rural housing, paragraphs 82 to 84 state:

82. In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local

needs, including proposals for community-led development for housing. Local planning authorities should support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs, and consider whether allowing some market housing on these sites would help to facilitate this.

83. To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

84. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a. there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;
- b. the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;
- c. the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;
- d. the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or
- e. the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:
 - i. is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and
 - ii. would significantly enhance its immediate setting, and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

2.1.8. In terms of achieving appropriate densities, paragraph 129 states:

Planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land, taking into account:

- a. the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it;
- b. local market conditions and viability;
- c. the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use;
- d. the desirability of maintaining an area’s prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and
- e. the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.

2.1.9. In terms of protecting Green Belt land, paragraph 142 states:

The government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

2.1.10. In terms of conserving and enhancing the natural environment, paragraph 187 states:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- b. recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- c. maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
- d. minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are

more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs;

- e. preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
- f. remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

2.1.11. In terms of development in National Landscapes and Heritage Coast areas, paragraphs 189, 190 and 191 state:

189. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas

190. When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a. 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;
- b. the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

- c. any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

191. Within areas defined as Heritage Coast (and that do not already fall within one of the designated areas mentioned in paragraph 189), planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within a Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate, unless it is compatible with its special character.

- 2.1.12. In terms of considering potential harm to heritage assets, paragraph 212 states:

When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

2.2. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- 2.2.1. In addition to the NPPF, there are a large number of Planning Practice Guidance documents published by the government.² These tend to provide more technical detail and expand on principles established in the NPPF.
- 2.2.2. Most PPGs are not directly relevant to the formation of the Flexible Settlement Policy. The following may be of some use to understanding the wider context:

Figure 3.1: shows relevant PPG

Planning Practice Guidance	Topics covered
Housing and economic needs assessment	Calculating the local housing need figure using the Standard Method
Housing supply and delivery	5-year housing land supply Housing Delivery Test

² Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

3. Context...

3.1. Existing local plans in Dorset

- 3.1.1. Currently, local plans in Dorset seek to control development using defined development boundaries, settlement boundaries, or village infill envelopes. Despite the different names, these designations essentially have the same aim. Their job is to distinguish between the built-up parts of settlements and the undeveloped countryside. For simplicity, we'll use the term settlement boundary in the remainder of this background paper.
- 3.1.2. Policies in the current local plans are supportive of development on windfall sites inside the settlement boundaries. Windfall sites are ones that have not been explicitly allocated in a plan. Outside the settlement boundaries, more restrictive policies apply. For example, new housing may only be supported outside the boundaries where it is for locally needed affordable housing, reuse of redundant buildings, or is essential for a rural worker.
- 3.1.3. The one exception to this approach in Dorset is in the Purbeck Local Plan (2018-2035), which was adopted in July 2024. Policy V1 sets out the 'spatial strategy for sustainable communities'. It states that the need for homes will be addressed through key allocations around selected settlements and, 'high quality small scale development on unallocated sites within the boundaries of settlements listed in the hierarchy or on small sites, outside the Green Belt, adjoining existing settlement boundaries of towns, key service villages, local service villages and other villages with a settlement boundary.
- 3.1.4. Policy H8 'Small sites next to existing settlements' sets out in more detail the planning issues for consideration when assessing proposals for these small residential development sites. Policy H8 includes a restriction on the number of homes permitted on small sites and criteria relating to landscape, house type and size, areas subject to a made neighbourhood plan and the impacts of small site development on habitat sites³.

³ 'Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.'

- 3.1.5. We have considered Policy H8 of the Purbeck Local Plan when preparing this background paper and the questions in our consultation document. A copy of the policy is presented in Appendix 1 to this paper, and some examples of planning applications for small sites from the Purbeck area are given in Appendix 2 to illustrate the types of development being considered.

3.2. Presumption in favour of sustainable development

- 3.2.1. National planning policy is underpinned by the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’. When deciding planning applications, this means that greater weight is given in support of development when local policies are deemed out of date. In the case of applications for housing, policies can be deemed out of date when either the housing land supply or the housing delivery rate fall below certain levels.⁴ In these situations, the settlement boundary can only be given limited weight. In recent years, this has resulted in a number of housing schemes being granted consent outside the settlement boundaries, often at appeal. It should be noted that despite this, other planning considerations still apply.⁵ Isolated developments are generally not acceptable, meaning that sites have to be adjacent or well connected to existing settlements.⁶

3.3. Moving forward...

- 3.3.1. Settlement boundaries have proven a successful tool in encouraging sustainable patterns of growth. By this we mean that new development is supported in existing settlements, where there are already existing facilities and public transport connections. However, it has been slow and difficult to update the settlement boundaries through the plan making process. We are also concerned that even if the boundaries are updated, the overall approach will be too restrictive to deliver the number of homes now needed.
- 3.3.2. The government has recognised there is a general undersupply of housing land that has led to a national ‘housing crisis’. This has meant that housing has

⁴ Footnote 8 on the NPPF requires there to be at least a 5-year housing land supply (plus buffers), and the Housing Delivery Test Result (the measure of housing delivery over the last 3 years) to be at least 75%.

⁵ In particular, the NPPF has policies to protect heritage assets (such as listed buildings), valued landscapes and important biodiversity habitats.

⁶ NPPF paragraph 84 lists exceptions where isolated homes in the countryside might be acceptable.

become unaffordable to many, including those on average incomes.⁷ In response, the government revised the Standard Method for calculating the local housing needs figure.⁸ This figure is the number of homes that we need to plan for. The latest figure for Dorset is 3,246 homes a year. To put this in context, it is 80% higher than previously (in 2024), and twice recent completion rates. Therefore, this is a challenging target and suggests a step change in approach is required. National policy requires us to prepare the new local plan positively to meet as much of the local housing need as possible.

⁷ The affordability ratio (the measure of median house prices compared to median earnings) now averages 11 for Dorset, which is higher than both the national and regional averages. See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoworkplacebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>

⁸ Details of the standard method are set out at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

4. New approach

4.1. Flexible Settlement Policy

- 4.1.1. We are suggesting that the current approach of limiting the identification of windfall sites to within settlement boundaries is revised to help support the delivery of more homes. We are proposing to remove all settlement boundaries and instead introduce a new Flexible Settlement Policy.
- 4.1.2. Providing the necessary criteria are satisfied, the policy would support the delivery of small to medium sized housing development schemes around the edge of Dorset's Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements (the policy would not apply in the South East Dorset Green Belt). So rather than the default answer of no, this policy may allow schemes of up to 30 dwellings provided certain criteria are met. The new homes would contribute to the supply and make a positive contribution towards meeting local housing needs. The approach also provides greater flexibility for private, and community-led housing in more rural areas, allowing existing villages to grow and thrive.

4.2. Meeting development needs

- 4.2.1. In order to arrive at a best estimate of potential housing supply arising from the Flexible Settlement policy approach, we have considered past planning permissions and delivery on windfall sites of 10–30 dwellings outside built-up areas, as well as potentially suitable sites currently in our SHLAA database.⁹ For example, over a 3-year period from 2019/20 to 2021/22, when there was a lack of a 5-year housing land supply in at least one of the adopted local plan areas in the Dorset Council area, planning permissions for around 71 homes per year were granted on sites that might fall within the Flexible Settlement policy category.
- 4.2.2. We consider that this provides a reasonable, if conservative, basis for estimating yearly supply from this source. We could apply an uplift to this estimate as we expect that the Flexible Settlement Policy would support delivery of more homes. If a modest 30% uplift were applied to the baseline we

⁹ SHLAA stand for the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. For more information, see <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/land-availability>

could expect around 92 homes each year to be delivered through the Flexible Settlement Policy.

- 4.2.3. We think that it could be reasonable to estimate that completions from such sites would start to come forward around six years following adoption of the local plan (expected in 2027) as it may take time for planning applications to come forward, for suitable sites to be identified and for applicants to gain familiarity with the policy and its requirements. We would not be able to rely on homes from this source as deliverable supply early in the plan period, but homes from this source are likely to provide developable supply in the medium and longer term. This assumption aligns with paragraph 72b of the NPPF, which states that plans should identify a supply of 'specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for the subsequent years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the remaining plan period.'
- 4.2.4. Therefore, between years 6 to 15 from the date of plan adoption we might expect a supply of between 710 and 920 dwellings through the application of the Flexible Settlement Policy. Because of the uncertainties around this potential source of supply, we have not made any allowances in the projected 'Housing supply and expected delivery' table presented as Figure 4.1 of our consultation document.

4.3. Limitations on new Flexible Settlement Policy

Green Belt

- 4.3.1. Green Belt is a nationally recognised policy designation made through local plans. There is one area of Green Belt in Dorset, which surrounds the edges of the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation (referred to as the large built-up area in national policy). In Dorset, Green Belt extends from the conurbation to surround the towns of Wareham, Upton, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne Minster, Colehill, Ferndown, West Parley, West Moors, Verwood, and St Leonards and St Ives. (There are also other smaller villages inset within, and surrounded by, or washed over by Green Belt).
- 4.3.2. Green Belt is intended to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.¹⁰ For this reason, we do not think that the Flexible Settlements Policy is appropriate for settlements within the Green Belt.

¹⁰ NPPF para 142.

- 4.3.3. However, it may still be possible to justify new homes in the Green Belt, but only where one of the exceptions relating to 'inappropriate development' can be demonstrated, or there are 'very special circumstances'. Government has recently defined 'grey belt' in national policy and added it as another exception where development in the Green Belt might be appropriate.¹¹

Size of site

- 4.3.4. While there is no firm definition of small or medium sized schemes, national policy suggests that these should be no larger than one hectare.¹² When considering typical benchmark densities, this suggests sites up to 30 dwellings might be appropriate. Local evidence suggests that most planning applications for new homes in Dorset fall within the 1-30 dwelling site size category. We consider that sites above this threshold are more appropriate for site allocation so they can be tested against alternatives at the plan making stage.
- 4.3.5. Policy H8 in the Purbeck Local Plan is similar to the Flexible Settlement Policy we are considering for the Dorset Local Plan. Its approach is that the size (i.e. numbers of proposed homes) of a scheme should be proportionate to the adjacent settlement, reflecting its size and character. It also sets a size limit of 30 homes on sites adjoining a town, a limit of 20 homes at key service villages, a limit of 15 homes at local service villages, and a limit of 5 homes at other villages with a settlement boundary.
- 4.3.6. We consider that this approach is too restrictive and that it would not prevent multiple sites coming forward, cumulatively exceeding these thresholds in any event. A more flexible approach would allow proposals to be assessed on a case-by-case basis taking account of the characteristics of the site and its context. We are therefore proposing a single site size threshold of 30 dwellings, whilst acknowledging that multiple Flexible Settlement sites may be permitted in appropriate locations. To ensure more incremental growth occurs, we are suggesting that subsequent phases of development must await the completion of earlier schemes closer to the existing settlement edge.
- 4.3.7. For the avoidance of doubt, we will continue to plan for sites above 30 dwellings through the local plan site allocations process. (We consider that this larger

¹¹ For more details of the types of development deemed acceptable in Green Belt, see Chapter 13 of the NPPF.

¹² NPPF para 73 requires plans to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare in order to promote small and medium sized sites.

scale development needs to be considered strategically through the local plan making process).

National Landscapes / Heritage Coast

- 4.3.8. Dorset also has two National Landscapes¹³ and two Heritage Coasts¹⁴. National policy is clear that when considering applications for development in National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that development is in the public interest.¹⁵
- 4.3.9. Within areas defined as Heritage Coast (that do not already fall within one of the designated National Landscapes) planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within defined Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate, unless compatible with its special character.¹⁶
- 4.3.10. Policy H8 of the Purbeck Local Plan makes it a requirement that the size, appearance and layout of proposed new homes shouldn't individually or cumulatively harm the character and value of any landscape or settlements.
- 4.3.11. We are proposing that a similar requirement is included in the proposed Flexible Settlement Policy, with further reference to National Landscapes and Heritage Coasts. However, it may be simpler and avoid unnecessary duplication if the policy cross-referred to a more general landscape protection policy.
- 4.3.12. Alternatively, National Development Management Policies may be sufficient when they are published. The idea of these is to provide a shared set of policies nationally to avoid their duplication at the local level. We will monitor the progress of National Development Management Policies and make appropriate reference to them when they are ready.

Design and sustainable development

- 4.3.13. There could be potential design and sustainability issues if this policy does not include suitable limitations and controls. Allowing settlements to grow in a piecemeal fashion could result in linear or 'ribbon' development patterns,

¹³ Dorset and Cranborne Chase. These were previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

¹⁴ West Dorset and Purbeck.

¹⁵ NPPF para 190.

¹⁶ NPPF para 191.

which would result in sprawl. As the new developments would be increasingly further from the centre of the settlement (which is typically where the facilities are), it could discourage walking and encourage more vehicle movements, which are more polluting and less sustainable.

- 4.3.14. The National Model Design Code explains on page 18 as part of the section Movement patterns:

'Well-designed places should be accessible and easy to move around. This can be achieved through a connected network of streets, good public transport, the promotion of walking and cycling and well-considered parking and servicing.'

- 4.3.15. Settlements that facilitate appropriate movement patterns promote healthy lifestyles. Any development that occurs through the Flexible Settlement Policy should facilitate sustainable movement patterns and avoid linear or ribbon development, unless robust design reasons can be provided.
- 4.3.16. We will assess development proposals using the design toolkit 'Building for a Healthy Life (BHL)'. Developments should be well connected and accessible via sustainable transport modes. Everyday facilities and services should be within cycle or walking distance of any future development.
- 4.3.17. To achieve this the policy should encourage active travel as opposed to the use of the car. BHL suggests people are willing to walk 400-800 metres (or a 5 to 10 minute) from their homes to facilities. Development could be required to be within certain distances of the facilities within the village that utilise well-designed pavements, footpaths and cycle routes. Or alternatively each site could be assessed on its merits in terms of sustainability, with a simpler requirement to ensure that access can be gained via a well-designed pavement or footpath to facilities no matter the relationship to facilities.
- 4.3.18. As stated in the supporting text to policy ENV7 ('Achieving high quality design') of the 2021 draft Dorset Local Plan, good design creates places that:
- are appropriate to their location and context;
 - are attractive and durable and function effectively;
 - enhance and support communities and the requirements of its residents;
 - enable and support healthy lifestyles; and

- are resilient to climate change. (Paragraph 3.8.2, Dorset Council Local Plan , Consultation January 2021)
- 4.3.19. We will encourage any proposed developments that come forward under the Flexible Settlement Policy to be based upon a design-led approach, which takes account of relevant local and national policies on design (e.g. the requirements of policy ENV7 and its supporting text of the emerging Dorset Council Local Plan). Development should respond to the principles of good design as set out in Figure 3.5 of emerging policy ENV7.
- 4.3.20. Developers should adhere to the local design expectations set out in the forthcoming design code for Dorset Council. In addition, regard should be had to national design guidance and good practice guides, neighbourhood plans; any relevant Supplementary Planning Documents; Landscape Character Assessments; masterplans and village / town design statements.
- 4.3.21. Thorough consideration of the site context and its wider setting should be assessed as part of any submission. Effective engagement with local communities about design should be undertaken at an early stage in the planning application process. For sites that we consider to be particularly sensitive, applicants will need to consider design matters in detail (including the information which they present as part of their planning application).
- 4.3.22. Any development should reflect the attractive qualities of the local character and be accessed via legible street patterns.

5. Application of the Flexible Settlements Policy

5.1. Defining key parameters

Built-up area and settlement edge

- 5.1.1. The Flexible Settlement Policy is intended to allow schemes of up to 30 homes to be permitted on sites on the edge of existing towns and larger villages (tiers 1, 2 and 3 settlements).
- 5.1.2. The settlement edge is the boundary or limit of a built-up area, such as a town or village, where the urban environment transitions into the countryside or rural area. Settlement edges are typically defined by physical features like roads, paths, field boundaries, and the curtilages of homes.
- 5.1.3. We acknowledge that without a line on a map there will be some scenarios where it may be unclear if this policy should apply. To ensure consistency in decision making we are proposing the following definitions of built-up area and settlement edge:
 - A built-up area is a densely populated area with a high concentration of buildings, infrastructure, and paved roads. The built-up areas of Dorset include the Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements. It excludes other settlements (such as smaller villages), clusters of buildings, or isolated farmsteads.
 - A settlement edge is a clear interface between the built edge of a settlement and open countryside. It is normally delineated by the curtilages of buildings, roads and field boundaries.

5.2. Development in the countryside

- 5.2.1. While the proposed approach is permissive of small and medium sized developments on the edge of Tier 1, 2 & 3 settlements outside the Green Belt, it is still our intention to generally restrict development in the open countryside.
- 5.2.2. National planning policy is clear that planning policies should promote sustainable development in rural areas and avoid isolated homes in the countryside. So, alongside the flexible settlements policy, we are also intending to include a countryside policy that continues to restrict development only to uses necessary at a countryside location (the countryside policy would not apply in built-up areas, as defined above, and the Flexible

Settlement Policy would provide an exception to the general position around restricting development). This policy would help ensure that the overarching spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy continues to be maintained.

- 5.2.3. The countryside policy would not restrict the scale of development in existing built-up areas. National planning policy promotes an effective use of land by giving substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements, promoting the development of under-utilised land and buildings and supporting opportunities to the use of airspace above existing residential and commercial properties. We are also intending the Local Plan to include an urban intensification and/or brownfield land policy that will continue to ensure we make the effective use of land and promotes development on brownfield sites.

5.3. Neighbourhood plans

- 5.3.1. Many communities across Dorset have prepared their own neighbourhood plans that set out local requirements for development including the introduction or modification of settlement boundaries. We think that it is important that this policy interacts with neighbourhood plans in a logical and fair way.
- 5.3.2. The terms of Policy H8 in the Purbeck Local Plan stipulate that the policy will not apply in areas where small sites have been allocated to meet identified housing needs in a made neighbourhood plan.
- 5.3.3. Nationally, paragraph 14 of the NPPF seeks to reward local communities that have recently met their identified housing requirement by dis-applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 5.3.4. For similar reasons, we propose that our Flexible Settlement Policy would not apply in areas with a recent neighbourhood plan (made in the last five years) which meets the identified housing requirement through policies and allocations.

6. Appendix 1 – Examples of ‘flexible settlements policies’

Purbeck Local plan Policy H8: Small sites next to existing settlements

Outside the Green Belt, applications for residential development will be permitted on sites adjoining the settlement boundaries of towns, key service villages, local service villages and other villages with a settlement boundary (as listed in the settlement hierarchy), provided that:

- a. the scale of proposed development is proportionate to the size and character of the existing settlement, up to a maximum of: i. 30 homes on any single small site adjoining a town; ii. 20 homes on any single small site adjoining a key service village; iii. 15 homes on any single small site adjoining a local service village; iv. 5 homes on any single small site adjoining other villages with a settlement boundary;*
- b. individually and cumulatively, the size, appearance and layout of proposed homes does not harm the character and value of any landscape or settlements potentially affected by the proposals;*
- c. the development would contribute to the provision of a mix of different types and sizes of homes (including affordable homes) to reflect the Council's expectations in Policies H9 and H11 or, where expressed in a neighbourhood plan, those of the relevant local community;*
- d. the site does not lie within a neighbourhood plan area where small sites have been allocated to meet identified housing needs in a made neighbourhood plan; and*
- e. the impact of proposed development on the national site network (including European sites), alone or in combination with other existing and proposed development, will be screened for likely significant effects under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (amended) (EU exit), 2019 and/or any equivalent relevant legislation or regulations. Where there is a probability or risk of a significant effect, the proposed development will be subject of an appropriate assessment (taking into account the lifetime of the development). Development proposals should, therefore, be accompanied by information reasonably required to undertake an appropriate assessment, and demonstrate how the development will avoid or otherwise mitigate any adverse impact on the integrity of any relevant site(s) in the national site network.*

West Somerset Policy SC1: Settlement Hierarchy.

Development within or in close proximity (within 50 metres) to the contiguous built-up area of Minehead/Alcombe, Watchet, Williton and primary and secondary villages will only be considered where it can be demonstrated that:

- A. It is well related to existing essential services and social facilities within the settlement, and;*
- B. There is safe and easy pedestrian access to the essential services and social facilities within the settlement, and;*
- C. It respects the historic environment and complements the character of the existing settlement, and;*
- D. It does not generate significant additional traffic movements over minor roads to and from the national primary and county highway route network*
- E. It does not harm the amenity of the area or the adjoining land uses.*

Development elsewhere in the open countryside will be considered under Policy OC1.

West Somerset's definitions

- *Built up area:*
An amalgam of buildings and built structures that collectively form a distinct developed form with a relatively continuous outer boundary / limit. The extent of the built-up area excludes parkland, parks, public gardens, formal and informal public open space, playing fields (including those associated with sports and educational institutions) and groups of farm and agriculture-related buildings where they are not wholly surrounded by other built development.
- *Limited Development:*
In clause 2 of the policy above, in terms of housing, "limited development" means individual schemes of up to ten dwellings providing about a 10% increase in a settlement's total dwelling number during the Local Plan period, limited to about 30% of this increase in any five-year period.
- *Small Scale Development:*
In clause 3 of the policy above, in terms of housing, "small scale development" means individual schemes of up to five dwellings providing about a 10% increase in a settlement's total dwelling number during the Local Plan period, limited to about 30% of this increase in any five-year period.

South Somerset Policy SS2: Development in rural settlements

Development in Rural Settlements (not Market Towns or Rural Centres) will be strictly controlled and limited to that which:

- *Provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement; and/or*

- *Creates or enhances community facilities and services to serve the settlement; and/or*
- *Meets identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.*

Development will be permitted where it is commensurate with the scale and character of the settlement, provides for one or more of the types of development above, and increases the sustainability of a settlement in general.

Proposals should be consistent with relevant community led plans, and should generally have the support of the local community following robust engagement and consultation.

Proposals for housing development should only be permitted in Rural Settlements that have access to two or more key services listed at Paragraph 5.41

Paragraph 5.41 states:

It is important to ensure that the occupiers of new homes in Rural Settlements are able to live as sustainably as possible by having easy access to basic facilities that provide for their day-to-day needs. Therefore, new housing development should only be located in those Rural Settlements that offer a range (i.e. two or more) of the following services, or that provide these within a cluster of settlements:-

- *local convenience shop;*
- *post office;*
- *pub;*
- *children's play area/sports pitch;*
- *village hall/community centre;*
- *health centre;*
- *faith facility; and*
- *primary school.*

7. Appendix 2 – Purbeck ‘Small Site’ case study examples

This Appendix 2 sets details of two planning applications submitted within the area where the Purbeck Local Plan (2018-2034) applies. The applications are being considered in accordance with the plan’s small sites policy (H8). The policy approach in H8 is similar to the Flexible Settlements Policy being considered for the emerging Dorset Council Local Plan.

Case Study 1

Planning application reference: 6/2019/0639

Location: Land North of West Lane, Stoborough, Wareham

Proposal: ‘Outline application for up to 15 residential dwellings, site re-profiling and assorted infrastructure, with all matters reserved apart from vehicular access from West Lane’

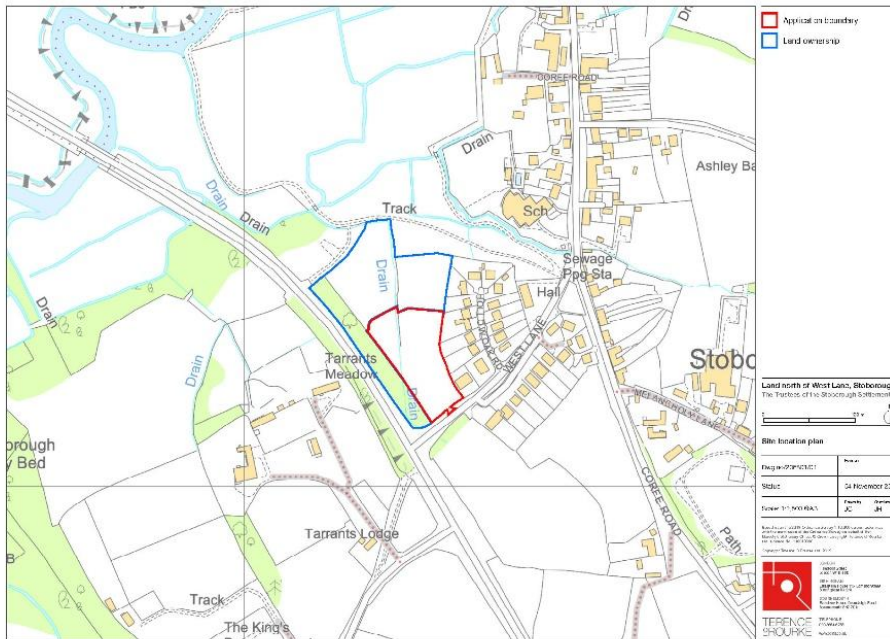
Status: Currently under consideration

Notes: The applicant considers that the site complies with the criteria of in Policy H8 of the adopted Purbeck Local Plan as:

- the scale of development (15 new homes) is consistent with the limiting policy criteria;
- the landscape impact has been assessed through a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- there is an appropriate mix of house types; and
- there is access to an appropriate Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space.

At the time of preparing this paper, the application remains undetermined.

Site location:



Indicative layout:



Case study 2

Planning application reference: P/FUL/2022/07955

Location: Land at Stepping Stones Field, Stoborough

Proposal: 'Erection of 9 dwellings (Use Class C3), including access, drainage, landscaping and associated infrastructure'

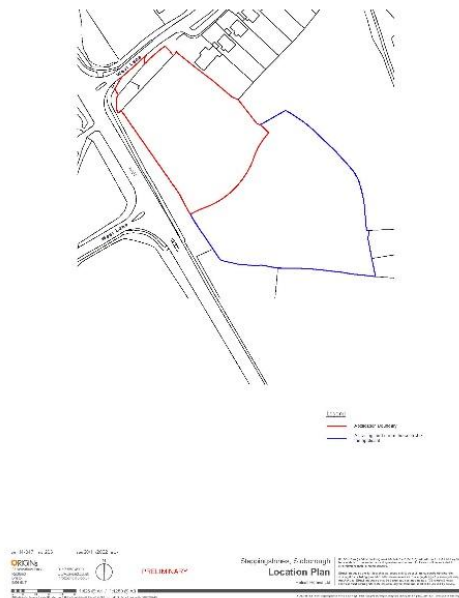
Status: Currently under consideration

Notes: The applicant states in their Design and Access Statement that their proposals have been prepared taking account of the site's characteristics, its landscape setting and the appearance and character of the surrounding area. The applicant clarifies that the site is around 0.84 hectares in area (giving a density of around 11 dwellings per hectare). As part of preparing the planning application, the applicant has also considered:

- the connections and relationship between the site and Stoborough and Wareham (including points of access along key roads and the site's relationship with Wareham Railway Station);
- accessibility to services and facilities (including shops and healthcare);
- the relationship between the site and the closest schools, publicly accessible open space and play areas;
- an analysis of the form, layout, scale, appearance and character of local buildings around the site;
- consideration of potential impacts on landscape and visual impacts;
- a summary of public engagement; and
- appropriate assessment setting out the potential impacts of development on habitat sites and approaches to mitigation.

At the time of preparing this paper, the application remains undetermined.

Site location:



Proposed layout:

