

Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan

Note of meeting with West Dorset Council officers 30 January 2017

<i>NP team:</i>	<i>West Dorset:</i>
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General

HJ stated that officers would be happy to talk about and advise on the draft plan as it emerges, prior to the regulation 14 consultation (the formal, 6-week consultation with the public). 'Bite-sized' parts of the Plan would be preferred than the whole Plan in one go. She also recommended that there be a meeting at the stage when the draft was complete and they would draw on their experiences with other NPs to advise us on viability and likely Examiner responses. WDDC cannot write the policies for us, but are happy to advise.

Regarding aspiration and risk: it comes down to how the Examiner decides to deal with any areas of issue, where there is a question of compliance with the Local Plan. They may amend the item, delete it or they could state that the Plan doesn't meet the basic conditions and the whole Plan is then rejected. WDDC can advise us on these areas of risk. Experience has shown that if the Council finds they can back a draft NP, the Examiner is less likely to find significant objections. HJ: actions/activities outside policy can be included as community aspirations in the Plan. If government policy changes in these areas, those aspirations could potentially be [developed into firmer policies in a future review of the NP](#)~~come a more concrete part of the Plan.~~

Viability and potential restriction on development are going to be the biggest areas we could be challenged on. [It will be important to demonstrate that any proposals for higher standards or requirements on development would not reduce the viability of development and prevent it coming forward.](#)

AL asked if the emerging Neighbourhood Plan had any status in planning decisions. HJ responded that not until the plan was adopted and then it would form part of/have the same status as the Local Plan. An emerging plan would carry only limited weight.

The Joint Council regards the nature of support so far from WDDC as too "light touch", given the complexity of the area and the push from WDDC for the five parishes to join under one Plan. Examples of North Dorset guidance were mentioned and a request that we be at least signposted to such items, which have proven helpful, though late in being found. WDDC [want to support Neighbourhood Plans and are proposing additional support such as a meeting prior to submission to discuss legal and procedural arrangements. But they cannot promise significant additional resource as they have the local plan to prepare and a large number of NPs in preparation in the area. were unable to reassure of any improvement to the service they can](#)

[offer, having no dedicated officer for Neighbourhood Plan support. WDDC officers advised that there were opportunities to apply for external funding for additional support. WDDC had also already given Bridport NP at £10,000 grant for project management earlier on in the process.](#)

Local Plan review – public consultation starts 6th February and the NP is encouraged to provide comment on areas which they would like to see amended.

Strategic policies

This was revisited a couple of times in order to try and gain clarity. Overall, HJ advised us:

- They will be looking for ‘general conformity’ with the Local Plan and had kept this deliberately loose to not stifle Neighbourhood Plans too much. There is room for some flexibility if we have evidence to support this.
- To comply with the ‘Strategic Approaches’ in the Local Plan (pp.12-14) is essential
- To be aware of [‘grey areas’ indirect effects](#) that could impact on the Strategic Approaches (example given was imposing overly high building material standards, which could render a housing development unviable and would therefore restrict development)
- Vearse Farm is the only ‘Strategic Allocation’ for housing in Bridport, the others can be (re)considered as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process if there is a local wish, provided the overall numbers are maintained
- The current level of housing in the Local Plan (total 945 [from allocated sites](#)) should not be undermined – the same or more is fine, but not fewer. We would also need to be careful about any policies that would reduce the likely supply within the built up area as well – i.e. what might come forward from the SHLAA sites within the built area, under the existing Local Plan policies.
- HJ agreed that [while BRID1, the allocation of Vearse Farm, was a strategic policy, the the other](#) Bridport specific policies in the Local Plan (BRID~~4~~2 to BRID45) were not strategic policies.

Climate Change

RJ: An original policy which had been prepared for the Local Plan which had set higher standards of building sustainability by JF was seen as ideal, and it was asked if this could, with suitable modifications, be brought back in and used in the Neighbourhood Plan? It would still be in conformity with Local Plan, just elaborating on it. HJ: National policy on this issue, and that includes Ministerial Statements, will always be the overriding policy. We run the risk that the Examiner will consider that the NP runs counter to this. WDDC will not prevent BANP from submitting an ambitious policy in this regard to the Examiner, but they might also express a concern that such a policy might not be in keeping with national policy.

Housing

GC: the draft HNA had already been submitted and feedback provided, but the housing group still has difficulties with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) because some of the

data is obscure. A review is needed alongside the Local Plan review as it has an impact on the level of affordable housing for Bridport. HJ: WDDC is currently waiting for the White Paper on Affordable Housing, which is likely to make changes to definitions of 'affordable housing' that can be negotiated through planning, as well as changes to the methodology for SHMAs. (NB since the meeting the White Paper has been published. The affordable housing definitions have been widened to include low cost market options, there is a requirement for 10% of all housing on sites of more than 10 to be for low cost market housing, and it is intended to consult further on a set of options for revising the methodology for defining total housing numbers for a local plan. Consultation on parts of the White Paper is now taking place, until May). ~~but it will be more an~~ The key issue is of how viability can be demonstrated rather than what the SHMA states as an affordable housing target – if the required target renders development unviable then the developers will not build any housing at all. TS: The consultants who researched and wrote the SHMA had been asked whether in their view it needed updating, and they replied that they considered it was still valid.

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PC: the issue of viability is a key one as local people would see that if a project breaks even, it is viable. HJ: The final decision on viability will be down to each site and ~~any challenges the site needs to address to build on it~~ will depend on the constraints and costs of developing that particular site – for example many brownfield sites are more expensive to develop because of the need to deal with issues such as contamination. It is also necessary to assume a reasonable return for the developer and landowner. JF: we have our own viability assessor who has to follow a standard methodology. The alternative is to develop sites as a community.

BW: How much evidence is needed for a policy to get through (to show viability)? HJ: development would still need to generate a particular level of profit and allow for any infrastructure improvements needed. If we got a willing landowner and developer who would build affordable, we could allocate sites for community build. AL: the change in government policy does give more support to self-build/custom build which could potentially give a better ratio for affordable housing. HJ: rural exception sites could be an option for the Neighbourhood Plan. Projects for alternative housing developments such as Self build, Custom build, Low Impact etc could be alternatives to provide for local housing needs where landowners may agree to provide land for this purpose and it is proved to be viable for development.

We need to ensure we keep our knowledge of emerging changes up to date (the next is likely to be the White Paper on Affordable Housing, due imminently).

GC: Housing themes which can be put forward as draft Neighbourhood Plan Policies are not enough on their own to address the area's housing shortage. As an example, the Housing Working Group is exploring ideas for alternative financing schemes to increase supply of lower cost housing. WDDC: Additional ideas can be included as "Aspirations" although they can't be used in planning decisions, their presence in a Neighbourhood Plan means they will not be lost sight of.

Economy

BW: to retain the vibrant nature of the town centre, there is a strong view about keeping the car parks currently allocated in the Local Plan for town centre extension. What are the extensions for and what are the implications of not including them? HJ: the need for additional capacity in

Bridport was identified in the Retail Capacity Study in 2008 (new study about to be commissioned) and it may be that there is no longer a need, given changes in shopping behaviour, but they will need to be advised by the study. Whilst the town centre boundary could be amended by the Neighbourhood Plan the risk is, if there is an application for an out of town retail development and we cannot show an in-town alternative, WDDC will find it harder to reject such an application. WDDC must apply the sequential test i.e. favouring town centre sites over edge-of-town centre sites over out-of-town sites. 'Comparative retail' just means anything but food and could mean chain and/or independent. JF: the policy doesn't suggest replacing the car parks, but they could be built above (multi storey), which would protect the parking but keep any new retail development in the town. WDDC will see if they have usage data from car park ticket machines.

Following the car parks issue (on which it was acknowledged local trade depends greatly), it was agreed that the Plan could provide an alternative area for retail expansion through an extension of the Town Centre boundary. The Local Plan currently proposes to extend it to the Rope Walks and Bus Terminal car parks. The Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to suggest other approaches.

BW: Vearse Farm has 4ha of employment land within the allocation, can there be value added by restricting this to particular business class uses? Plus is there scope to include affordable employment space for start-ups? JF: discussions are ongoing with the developer and members of the Bridport community and the question had been asked whether there could be a Community Land Trust to manage such a facility? Vearse Farm is a key employment site and is therefore strategic (ECON2 in Local Plan). TS: the uses are already restricted on the site (no retail), so not sure that an additional policy would be needed anyway?

Transport

PC: A question on behalf of the Transport group as they have identified a need to address traffic movement, remove traffic lights, pedestrian the top of South Street and improve the Miles Cross junction – what can the Neighbourhood Plan do on these issues? TS: Miles Cross is being considered alongside the Vearse Farm discussions and Highways England has stated that junction improvements will be needed. HJ: how would the other ideas be implemented? County Council is the highways authority – the ideas would form 'aspirations' in the Plan rather than policies (another local Neighbourhood Plan saw these moved from policy to aspiration by the Examiner). CIL income could perhaps be used to help achieve aspirations. TS: will contact the County Council regarding these issues for advice, including car parks and will report back.

Follow on questions for WDDC officers:

1. Out of the policies BRID1-5, please can you state categorically which of these is/are strategic policies? [Table 3.7 on pages 68-69 of the Local Plan state quite clearly that BRID1 is a strategic allocation and that the others in Bridport are not. This is a specific column in the table and is cross-referred to from the 'strategic approach' section at the start of chapter 3.](#)

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2. The overall amount of development is also a strategic matter however – the same ‘strategic approach’ section states that development should help deliver a steady supply of housing land to meet the projected need of 15,500 across the plan area. So while the other allocations are not in themselves strategic, it would be important for any neighbourhood plan to avoid any approaches that would reduce housing delivery from that which would result from the local plan. This means that while a strategic allocation can’t be changed, others could be, as long as they were replaced with alternative sites that would deliver the same amount.

3.

4. BRID4 is a bit different as a non-housing allocation. It is not a strategic allocation, but the ‘strategic approach’ to chapter 4 (Economy) includes the fact that retail and town centre uses will be directed to the town centres, and that development should not undermine the functioning of any town centre or adversely affect its viability or vitality. This is also a key part of national policy. So if there is a need for further retail uses, it is important that sites as close to the town centre as possible are made available. Current need will be assessed through the retail study.

1-5.

When the next retail study is underway, please advise if local organisations such as Bridport Chamber of Trade will be consulted? The retail study will be a technical study, which will include a telephone survey of a statistically valid sample of residents to assess current shopping patterns and an assessment of current expenditure and how much of it is going to the local town centres. As such there will not be consultation as part of it, though there will be consultation on any resulting changes to the local plan, as part of the Preferred Options stage of consultation. I know this is an area that the NP group is interested in, and we can let you know if there are conclusions that you need to be aware of.

2-6.