

## **Response to Examiner Questions Final 29 August 2019**

### **Background**

Questions from Deborah McCann, the consultant appointed by Dorset Council to examine the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP) were received by Bridport Town Council via Dorset Council on August 9th 2019.

The Examiner questions focus on two lines of enquiry; evidence for the BANP Principle Residency Housing policy and the process undertaken to arrive at the list of sites proposed for Green Space designation.

BANP Steering Group members responsible for developing housing and landscape policies have helped to provide material for this response and provision of additional evidence.

**The Joint Councils Committee approved this response to go forward to the Examiner and Dorset Council at their meeting on August 29<sup>th</sup> 2019.**

It is understood that this response, sent to Dorset Council, will be redacted by them to allow the response to go online and be made available to the public.

### Question 1

***“The Neighbourhood Plan Area includes a number of distinct settlements. The impact of second home ownership between settlements within the Neighbourhood Plan Area appears to differ. Having looked at the evidence regarding the number of second homes within the Bridport Neighbourhood Plan Area there seems to be some discrepancy between the data set out in the Bridport Area parishes imported from "West Dorset" tab of DCC Empty Property Data, 2 Oct 2017 and the data within the NP evidence base. Please provide clarification on the apparent difference between the figures and Is there any additional existing evidence, specific to the Neighbourhood Plan Area to support this policy including impact on house prices?***

### JCC Response

There are several facets to the question, which are best dealt with in turn:

- a) Discrepancy between DCC Empty Property Data and NP evidence base.
- b) Variation in second home ownership between settlements.
- c) Additional evidence including impact on house prices.

#### **a) Discrepancy between DCC Empty Property Data and NP Evidence Base.**

The Local Authority uses Council Tax returns as a basis for estimating the number of empty properties, which at October 2017 gave 431 second homes out of a total of 7821 (5.5%, or 1 in 18 homes). On the face of it this would appear a relatively mild incursion, however the level of public concern expressed during consultations prompted us to look deeper. A newspaper front-page article (Bridport News, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2018) reporting that a quarter of West Dorset homes are sold as second homes suggested that there may be more second homes than DCC know about. We were able to corroborate the newspaper article using HMRC records of higher rate stamp duty, in fact HMRC provided us the specific figure of 27% in 2017-18 for the DT6 postcode area (which is approximately coincident with the NP area).

On questioning DCC it became apparent that their primary interest is in the income from Council Tax. As “second homes” are liable to the same Council Tax as primary residences, there is no reason for them to waste resources on checking on how a home is being used between changes of ownership. This was confirmed by a response from WDCC (their reference FOI WDDC 6414, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018) which states (our emphases in bold):

*“We establish the correct liability for Council Tax by requesting relevant information **from new owners or occupiers**. Information is collected from the*

*customer through various channels, i.e. liability enquiry forms, online change of address form, correspondence from the customer, etc.*

*Regulations require that billing authorities take reasonable steps to ascertain entitlement to discounts. **We do not carry out reviews in relation to Second Homes Classes A and B**, as no discount is applicable to these classes of dwelling.”*

The Council officer suggested that an alternative source of information for our purposes was ONS census data, since this is related to the occupancy of a property. On census returns, such homes are recorded as “No usual residents”, for which the official definition is:

*“A household space with **no usual residents** may still be used by short-term residents, visitors who were present on census night, or a combination of short-term residents and visitors. Vacant household spaces, and household spaces that are used as second addresses, are also classified in census results as ‘household spaces with no usual residents’”.*

This is a good proxy for a definition of a “holiday or second home” – in other words, not a principal residence.

The ONS figures are updated only every ten years with the most recent census having been in 2011, however even that shows roughly double the second home population known to DCC, at 10.6% across the NP Area. Moreover by comparing the 2011 census data with the equivalent from the two previous censuses, 2001 and 1991, an extrapolation can be carried out to give an indication of the likely trajectory of this figure, which (using even the most benign linear model for an increase) suggests that by 2021 the figure is likely to be at least 15%, as shown in the HNA. This we believe is sufficiently intrusive to be detrimental to the stability and sustainability of the area.

If instead of a linear extrapolation a “best fit” curve is used to predict future trend of second home ownership (reflecting the HMRC information on second home transactions) the result is far higher – a predicted 22% by 2021. We have not included the “best fit” prediction in our HNA since we believe that it could not be defended if challenged, however it is a possible scenario.

The two projections – linear, and best fit - are shown in the graphics below. The ONS data is in an Excel spreadsheet “Second homes Bridport Area 1991-2011” in the NP evidence base.

## **b) Variation in Second Home Ownership between Settlements.**

While all five parishes within the NP area have significant numbers of houses “with no usual residents” by the Census definition, the proportion as measured in 2011 varied from 8.6% to 16.4% (probably 11% to 19% today, assuming a linear growth in the number of such properties since 2001). The lowest density is Allington parish and the highest is Symondsbury parish, which contains both the village and also much of the coastal settlement West Bay, both popular with visitors.

It could be argued that the need for a policy to curtail the growth of second homes is less justifiable in the parishes with lower proportions, however the Neighbourhood Plan development team have taken the view that placing a restriction in any particular area (whether defined by parish, postcode or any other means) will simply displace the problem across its border to a neighbouring one, because no part of the NP area is far from any other. It was also felt that as a communally developed plan, it would be divisive to apply policies unevenly across the plan area.

For these reasons draft Policy H9 is applied without exception to the NP Area as a whole. The second home proportions for each of the five parishes, with projections to 2021, are shown in **Figure 1 & 2**.

## **c) Additional Evidence including Impact on House Prices.**

No numerical evidence is presented upon the impact on house prices, because we believe that it would be too speculative (a “what if” scenario). However it is, we believe, self-evident that if the growth in properties being used as second homes is restricted, more of them will be available as main residences to the local home-buying market. As market prices are driven by availability, the effect will be to put a brake on increases in the cost of a new home.

Between 2001 and 2011, the ONS census reports show that the average annual growth of second homes was 49.5 properties per year. If that growth were only to be halved by a Principal Residence policy (allowing that existing homes could well be bought as second homes) it would still result in 25 fewer homes becoming removed from the principal residence stock. Against a background build rate of only 38 completions per annum over the last 10 recorded years (**HNA Appendix 3.5.1**) this would be a really significant gain for local residents, which is the thrust of the policy.

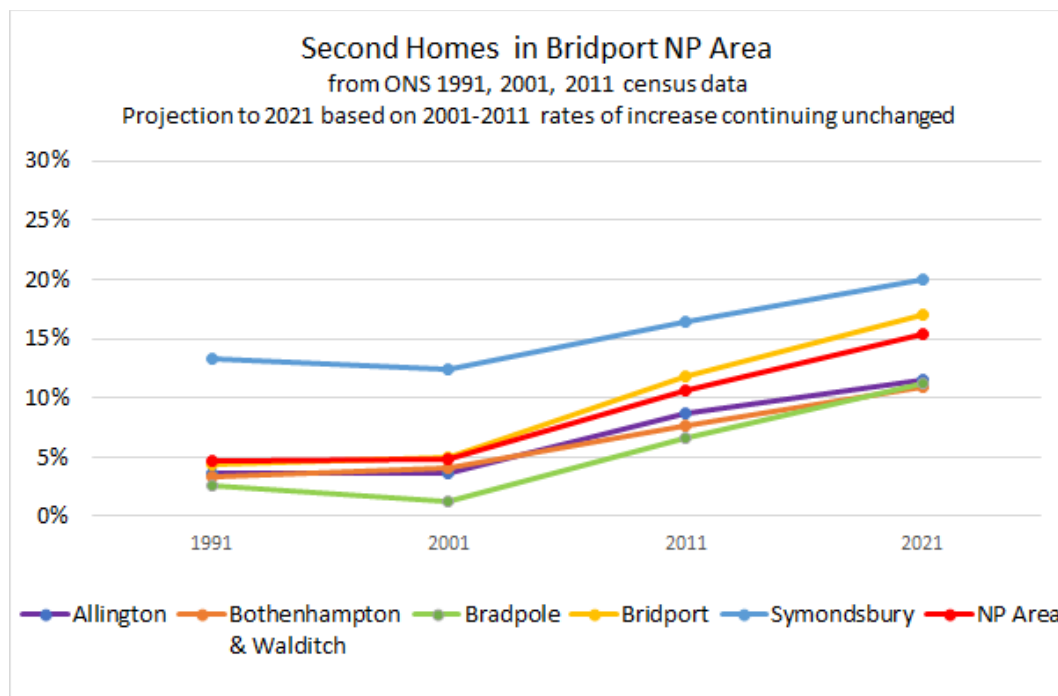
Much of the pressure to develop a Principal Residence policy had come from residents. To determine what level of support or opposition might exist within the local business community, having developed the policy in outline the NP team

undertook a survey via the Bridport Business Chamber (formerly the Chamber of Commerce). The results showed no firm bias one way or the other. ***The survey is summarised in HNA Appendix 2.7.***

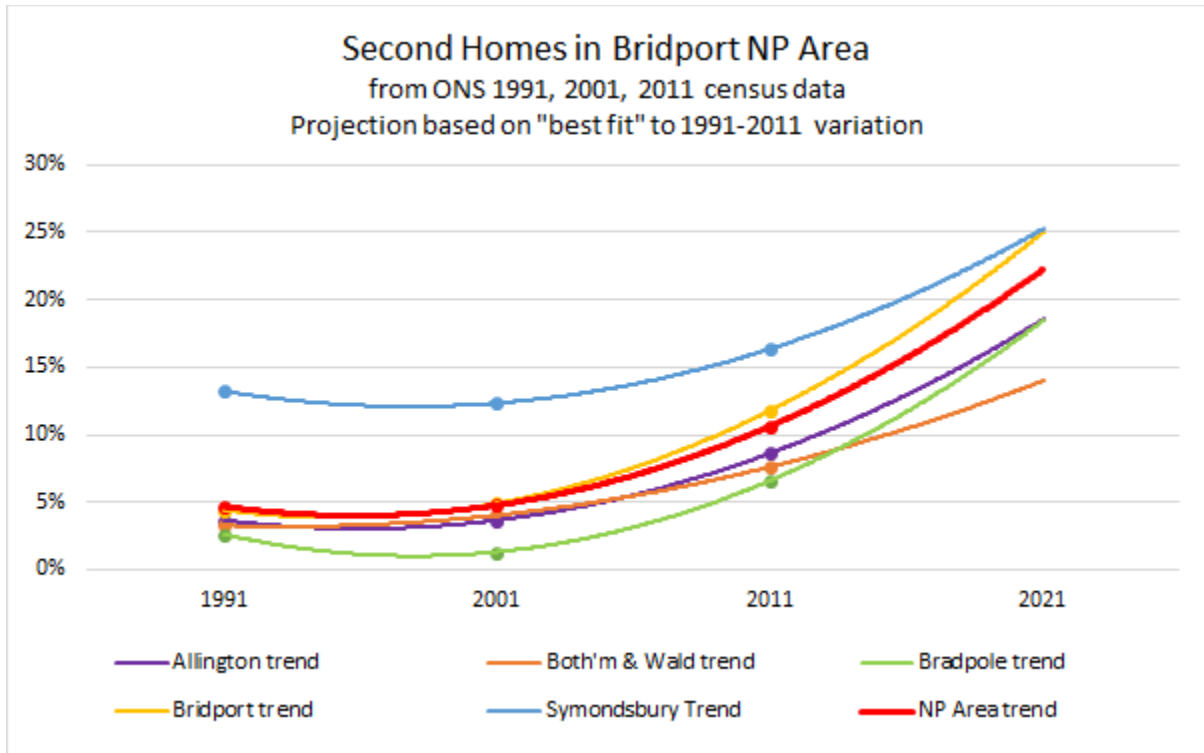
There is widespread anecdotal evidence, but not used in the HNA or in the development of the policy, that there are already social impacts of too-numerous holiday homes in that houses and flats remain empty for long periods to the detriment of community life and the local economy. Such feelings, while genuinely held and probably accurate, were beyond the resources of our neighbourhood plan to quantify and use as proof of an existing second home “blight”. The development of the policy has concentrated instead upon the consequence of too many new homes being unavailable to would-be permanent residents due to their being put into only occasional use.

### **Graphical presentations of ONS Census data for households “with no usual residents”, 1991 to 2011**

**Figure 1** - shows the “cautious” projection used in the Housing Needs Assessment:



**Figure 2** - is the “best fit” projection based upon the historic rate of growth in second homes in each of the five parishes. It may be more realistic but can not be proved without a full door-to-door survey of the whole area, so it has not been used:



## Question 2 - POLICY L3 Local green spaces

***The Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan proposes the designation of a number of Local Green Spaces. Whilst I have been provided with information regarding how the areas meet the NPPF tests I cannot locate the information confirming that the owners of the proposed Local Green Spaces have been consulted or a copy of their responses. This in particular relates to the following sites:***

***\* Watton Hill Bradpole- Symondsburys Estate***

***\* Area known as Happy Island Bradpole / Bridport-The Co-op, Travis Perkins, Mr Ted Seal, Spray Copse Farm***

***\* Cooper's Wood and Field, Allington -Woodland Trust***

***\* Allington Hill Allington-Woodland Trust***

***Please can I be provided with this information.***

### JCC Response

The research of Green Spaces across the neighbourhood plan area was undertaken by a Working Group of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The community volunteers undertook and came forward with proposals for areas to be designated as green spaces and green gaps. Research was undertaken between 2016 and 2017 using best practice guidance. A Green Spaces Overview report v3 2017 was produced setting out the process undertaken for assessing and designating green spaces in the BANP (***see Appendix 1***).

All landowners and Parish Councils were sent letters in the Spring of 2017 informing them of the proposal to include sites as designated green spaces in the BANP (***see Appendix 2 for copies of letters and responses received at the time; specifically from the Seals, landowners at Happy Island and the Woodland Trust***).

The Consultation Report on the 2017 “Issues consultation” includes summaries of responses regarding the proposal to protect green spaces. This document highlights the importance to the community of ‘protecting’ green spaces, in particular the area known as Happy Island. No objections were raised by any landowners to green space protection at this stage. (***see Appendix 3 – Extract from 2017 Consultation Report – Green Spaces***).

At the launch of the Regulation 14 consultation letters were sent to statutory consultees and selected landowners informing them of the Regulation 14 consultation process, where to access the document and how to respond. (***see Appendix 4 – Letter and landowner listing***)

The Regulation 14 Consultation Report demonstrates strong community support for protection of the distinctive skyline around Bridport, and specifically in support of Policy LH4 – Green Space designation. 92 respondents supported the LH4 policy, 4 Don't knows and 5 objected to the policy (***see Appendix 5 - Excel spreadsheet showing all comments received on Heritage and Landscape issues with LH4 comments highlighted in red text***)

Through the online questionnaire written responses to the Regulation 14 consultation were received on behalf of the Watton Hill Trust and Symondsbury Farm. (***see Appendix 6***). This representation requests deletion of Watton Hill from the Green spaces designation and proposes an amendment to the Green Gaps anti-coalescence area to the west of the Hill.

A written response was received from Ross Jessopp regarding the green space designation boundary for Happy Island (***see Appendix 7***). As a result this response the boundary for the Happy Island Green Space area was amended in the Regulation 15 submission version.

Finally the BANP JCC would like to make the Examiner aware that Phillip Colfox of the Symondsbury Estate is currently Chair of Symondsbury Parish Council and has been an active parish councillor throughout the development process of the BANP. As one of the participating Parishes Symondsbury has been fully informed about the BANP, including all policy proposals prior to public consultation. Phillip Colfox was the Symondsbury Parish Council representative on the BANP Steering Group for a period in 2018.

It is our understanding that Watton Hill Trust, Symondsbury Farms and Symondsbury Estates operate functionally as one organisation.