

Bridport Town Council Response to Dorset Housing Strategy Consultation 2023

Vision

Our vision is to ensure our residents have access to affordable, suitable, secure homes where they can live well and be part of sustainable and thriving communities.

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this vision?

Please tick only one item

	Strongly agree
	Agree
	Neither agree nor disagree
X	Disagree - <i>go to Q5 if selected</i>
	Strongly disagree - <i>go to Q5 if selected</i>
	Don't know

Only answer if you selected disagree or strongly disagree at Q4, other go to Q6.

Q5. Please tell us why you disagree with the vision. Please use the space below.

It is hard to disagree with the vision statement. However, the real meaning and value of the statement stands or falls on the interpretation of the words used. 'Affordable', 'secure', 'sustainable', 'thriving'. These are not precise terms that can demand unqualified support without going on to understand what is really meant by their use in the vision.

The most commonly referred to definition of affordable housing is set out in Annex 2 to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This is the definition used by local planning authorities when making provision within their areas to meet local demand and need for affordable housing. The NPPF definition incorporates social rent, as well as a range of intermediate rent and for-sale products. The Affordable Housing Commission (2020) concluded "many" of these products "are clearly unaffordable to those on mid to lower incomes". In the context of the average local incomes in the Bridport area, a 20% reduction on market rates does not go far enough to address local housing needs.

A Housing Strategy for Dorset should be made clear that the current definition of 'affordable' is not affordable to most people in housing need on low or middle incomes across the county?

The vision lacks appropriate acknowledgement of the climate emergency. The construction industry and the domestic energy market are major challenges for a net zero future. Any vision for housing must be committed to lowering GHG emissions through adaptation and mitigation. Driving the transition to use of natural materials and modern methods of construction as well as higher levels of energy efficiency and renewable energy generation.

For BTC the vision lacks real determination to change the broken housing system. We need to move beyond political platitudes and commit to specific, ambitious policies to improve the dynamic of the housing market. Giving appropriate emphasis to the housing needs of local people within the context of local income levels.

What's important to you?

Q6. We have identified that the following matters are important and we want to know your views on them. Please rate each of the following matters on a scale where 1, is not very important to you to 5, is very important to you.

	Not very important - 1	2	3	4	Very important 5	No opinion
Building more social and affordable housing for rent					X	
Homelessness (e.g., people who are at risk of losing their home or have already lost their home)				X		
Supporting affordable home ownership for first time buyers and working age people			X			
Improving the standard of rented housing				X		
Providing specialist housing for older people (e.g, extra care and retirement housing)				X		
More homes which are accessible and/or adapted for disabled people				X		
Support to help people live independently in their own homes				X		
Deliver more community led housing schemes through Community Land Trusts and Neighbourhood Plans					X	
More housing to meet the needs of people in their local communities				X		
Infrastructure to support new housing development (e.g., road improvements, school places and GP capacity)				X		
Protecting historic buildings and local character			X			
Design of new homes (e.g., to improve energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact,					X	
protect natural environment, and to be easier to adapt to changing needs)					X	

Using council land and assets for affordable housing					X	
Homes for keyworkers (e.g., NHS staff, care workers)					X	
Providing more specialist supported accommodation for children & young people (e.g., young people with physical & learning disabilities)						X
Providing more housing with support for adults. (e.g, for people with, mental health, issues, drug and alcohol issues, physical disability, learning disabilities)						X
Reducing the impact of second homes on availability of housing					x	
Reducing the impact of Airbnb on availability of housing			X			

Q7. Is there anything you think we've missed from the list of statements in the previous question?

BTC expected to see greater emphasis on ensuring that the design and build methods for new homes in Dorset are consistent with policies aimed at achieving a net zero future. House building is a carbon intensive process and this has to change if we are to meet targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Dorset Council, through the planning process, can make a real difference to the impact house building has on a wide range of climate and nature policies – from biodiversity gains to the choice and use of building materials through to energy generation and use.

Much more needs to be done to drive energy saving retro fit of the existing housing stock. Some 30% of Bridport’s housing stock falls in the lowest EPC bands. Poorly insulated housing can have negative impacts on health and wellbeing due to the costs and inefficiencies of heat energy.

It is worth reflecting on the approach to specialist housing for elderly people, especially the provision of retirement homes. In communities like Bridport, the ageing demographic will present serious challenges over the coming years. More homes for older people simply adding to the problem we now face, with a huge economic imbalance from the age structure, and unsustainable pressure on health/care services arising from a disproportionately aging population.

There’s nothing in the list of statements about the challenge of planning constraints to delivery of housing commitments. Without a change in national planning policy, it is unlikely that Dorset Council can deliver on housing targets or net zero homes.

One omission from the Housing Strategy is any consideration of the needs of travellers. In Bridport we are seeing an increase in people adopting a traveller lifestyle, sleeping in vans in car parks and on the highway, without any facilities and apparently without any engagement with/from public service providers. No-one knows what conditions they’re living in, whether it’s their choice or forced on them, or what needs they may have. This is an area of housing policy that should be addressed.

Q8. Please ONLY rank the top 5 that are important to you, with 1 being the most important.

Please number your top 5 choices from the list below.

Building more social and affordable housing for rent	1
Homelessness (e.g., people who are at risk of losing their home or have already lost their home)	
Supporting affordable home ownership for first time buyers and working age people	
Improving the standard of rented housing	
Providing specialist housing for older people (e.g, extra care and retirement housing)	
More homes which are accessible and/or adapted for disabled people	4
Support to help people live independently in their own homes	
Deliver more community led housing schemes through Community Land Trusts and Neighbourhood Plans	5
More housing to meet the needs of people in their local communities	
Infrastructure to support new housing development (e.g., road improvements, school places and GP capacity)	
Protecting historic buildings and local character	
Design of new homes (e.g., to improve energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact, protect natural environment, and to be easier to adapt to changing needs)	2
Using council land and assets for affordable housing	
Homes for keyworkers (e.g., NHS staff, care workers)	3
Providing more specialist supported accommodation for children & young people (e.g., young people with physical & learning disabilities)	
Providing more housing with support for adults. (e.g, for people with, mental health, issues, drug and alcohol issues, physical disability, learning disabilities)	
Reducing the impact of second homes on availability of housing	
Reducing the impact of Airbnb on availability of housing	

Objectives

The housing strategy will set out our 5 year aims and objectives for housing in Dorset. Based on the evidence we have been considering the following aims and objectives:

Q9. Are these the right aims and objectives for housing needs?

Housing Need

Key Objective: Enabling residents to live safe, healthy, independent lives in homes that meet their needs.

Aim: We will invest in and provide a selection of housing and support services that promote healthy, safe, and independent lives.

Please select only one item

	Yes
x	No
	Don't know

Is there anything missing? Please tell us here.

The objective lacks firm commitments to address housing need. BTC wishes to emphasise the urgent need for social rent housing and keyworker accommodation to address the recruitment crisis in health care and other essential services for our community. As previously stated, the objective does little to address the climate or ecological emergency.

In the supporting evidence base 2023 for the Housing Strategy there is reference to the fact that Dorset has 11 areas with a high level of deprivation. Going on to identify that 10 are in Weymouth/ Portland and 1 in the former west Dorset Area. We assume this is reference to The Skilling area of Bridport (part of LSOA West Dorset 008A) which is in the lowest 30% for overall deprivation, and Court Orchard, Bridport (part of LSOA West Dorset 006B) which is in the lowest 20%.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation does not take account of the fact that deprivation is amplified when seen in a rural and isolated context – the surrounding area is relatively wealthy which means, for example, lower demand for public services. By way of illustration, public transport spending in Dorset reduced by 63% between 2010 and 2019, so if you're too poor to own a car and living in Bridport, a rural market town, your employment opportunities, and your access to education and training are severely curtailed by the absence of buses. As another example there are **no** dentists accepting NHS patients in our area, so if you can't afford private dentistry, there is no access to treatment except in an emergency.

Q10. Are these the right aims and objectives for housing supply?

Housing Supply

Key Objective: Driving the delivery of homes people need and can afford to live in

Aim: We aim to increase the supply of affordable and social housing, which will help to ensure that all residents in Dorset have access to high-quality housing that is affordable to buy or rent. To achieve this, we will work with our partners to identify and support a range of housing options that meet the needs of our community.

Please select only one item

	Yes
x	No
	Don't know

Is there anything missing? Please tell us here.

This objective fails to identify the need to build new homes that reduce greenhouse gas emission in construction and operation. High levels of energy efficiency and the ability to generate renewable energy will be critical to achieving the emission reductions required to meet government targets.

This objective should be clear about the distinction between 'affordable' and 'social housing' – In Bridport the defined housing need is for more social rent housing and more one and two bed properties to meet current and projected housing need. Under current definition of 80% of market rates the provision of 'affordable' housing will not address the housing needs of local people on average levels of income.

To provide confidence that these are more than fine words the objective should include firm commitment to deliver the housing supply that we know is required in Dorset; for example, the number or % of new homes that are required for social rent and the number or % of 1 and 2 bed properties required to meet need.

Issues relating to housing are strongly linked to considerable and persistent disadvantages for coastal communities, like Bridport. These systemic problems must be addressed by the Government at all levels in partnership with local communities. Interventions in the housing sector must be accompanied by positive support for place-based regeneration. BTC has produced the [Bridport Investment Plan](#) specifically to encourage joined up interventions to support improvements for people, place and environment.

Q11. Are these the right aims and objectives for housing standards?

Housing Standards

Key Objective: Improving the quality, standard, and safety of homes.

Aim: We are committed to improving the quality of housing for everyone by forming strong partnerships, using resources wisely, and making sure that regulations are enforced. ***Please select only one item***

	Yes
x	No
	Don't know

Is there anything missing? Please tell us here.

This objective lacks firm commitments that could focus on the changes to the housing market we know are needed. In particular, how to improve the performance of the existing housing stock in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and the need to change planning policy to deliver higher standards of energy efficiency.

Q12. Are these the right aims and objectives for the prevention of homelessness?

Prevention of Homelessness

Key Objective: Support, at the right time, to people in crisis to prevent homelessness.

Aim: We recognise that we need to offer a range of housing options for people in crisis, and we are committed to tackling homelessness by providing support and assistance to help people find suitable long-term housing solutions.

Please select only one item

	Yes
X	No
	Don't know

Is there anything missing? Please tell us here.

The wording of this objective fails to recognise that you can't always "prevent" homelessness, and more provision need to be made for people who find themselves without a home.

BTC would like to see the Housing Strategy address the increasing insecurity faced by residents in the rental housing sector. The precariousness of housing provision can result in tenants enduring poor quality housing and in the worst case can lead to increases in homelessness.