

Minutes of a meeting of the NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN JOINT COUNCILS COMMITTEE (NPJCC) held in the Committee Room at Mountfield on Thursday 27 February 2025 at 10.00am.

PRESENT: Members: Jonathan Bourbon (Bridport Town Council), Kelvin Clayton (Bridport Town Council), Andrew Holdridge (Bridport Town Council, arrived 10.51am), Patrick Mooney (Bridport Town Council) and Paul Hartmann (Symondsburry Parish Council).

Also present: Cllr Sarah Carney (Bridport Town Council), Cllr Ann Langridge (Bridport Town Council), Cllr David Worthington (Bridport Town Council), Abby Gordon-Farleigh (Stir to Action), Phyllida Culpin (NP Steering Group), Jim Tigg (NP Steering Group), Glenn Crawford (NP Steering Group), David Dixon (Project Manager), Caroline Pearce (Project Manager) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

The start of the meeting was delayed until 10.30pm, as the Chairman had advised he would be late arriving.

PUBLIC FORUM

No members of the public spoke in the Public Forum.

18. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

In the absence of Cllr Andrew Holdridge as Chairman, it was

RESOLVED: that Cllr Paul Hartmann be elected Chairman for this meeting.

19. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Dave Bolwell, and Andrew Holdridge (for lateness).

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the NPJCC held on 28 November 2024 be approved, and that the Chairman should sign these as a correct record.

RESOLVED: that Glenn Crawford, Jim Tigg and Phyllida Culpin be invited to participate in discussion of the next item.

22. REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Workspace and Business Needs Draft Report

David Dixon, Project Manager, reported on a Workspace & Business Needs Assessment carried out in support of the light review of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP). He advised that Stir to Action had been commissioned to carry out the assessment.

Abby Gordon-Farleigh of Stir to Action summarised the assessment, with supporting slides covering:

- Expanding flexible and affordable workspaces
- Recommended updates to BANP policies
- Improving infrastructure and utilities
- Supporting recruitment and workforce development
- Addressing the link between workspace and housing
- Proposed projects and actions

David Dixon advised that the findings would be incorporated into the objectives, supporting text, projects, and where achievable the policies of a reviewed BANP. The findings could also inform a review of the Bridport Investment Plan.

Members discussed:

- The extent to which the boundaries of a light review could be 'pushed' to achieve the greatest benefit for the area;
- The relatively small sample size of businesses engaged in the assessment, which had been a consequence of resource constraints;
- Concerns about an apparent 'disconnect' between secondary/tertiary education and the local area, which meant many young people move away for work;
- Whether the light review could incorporate new policies. David Dixon advised this was a matter for the examiner and was not a precise science;
- A need for early sight of Dorset Council's intentions for the Local Plan, to ensure alignment;
- The permissions required to convert premises that were only partly used for business purposes;

Cllr Andrew Holdridge arrived at this point (10.51am). Cllr Hartmann continued in the chair

- The need for policies to support better use of the available workspace, and the role of the Steering Group in proposing textual and other amendments to enable this;
- Problems faced in renting space for business;
- Dorset Council's constraints on business, for example in preventing the rebuild of barns and not allowing noise;
- Ways to encourage shared and multiple use of spaces, and the complexities associated with this;
- Signposting businesses to grants for retrofit;
- Encouraging links between business and the Sir John Colfox Academy;

- The potential for development of a hub to bring together links and advice;
- The value of old buildings lying largely in the land value, which meant that grants primarily benefited the landowner;
- The extent to which the redevelopment of St Michael's Trading Estate might contribute to meeting workspace needs, and whether this would require government funding; and
- A place to showcase successful youth enterprise and share ideas and advice.

BANP Designated Area

David Dixon summarised a report proposing an application to change the BANP designated area to accord with revised parish boundaries following a community governance review. The proposed boundary would consist of the entirety of the changed Bridport and Symondsbury parishes, that had come into effect in April 2024.

RESOLVED: that a request be submitted to realign the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area, in accordance with the report.

Housing Needs Assessment

David Dixon introduced a report introducing a draft Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) produced for the NPJCC by consultants AECOM. The draft could not be published for general comment until such time as the NPJCC had agreed initial comment. Once accepted by Locality, the HNA would be the final version for the BANP. The report also incorporated draft comments proposed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Members welcomed the work undertaken so far and thanked the Steering Group for their draft comments. Matters discussed were:

- A concern that the AECOM draft might lead to incorrect conclusions;
- A suggestion that the report was too long and lacked succinct conclusions;
- Whether the emphasis on demand for older people's housing was unexpected;
- A possible overstatement of affordable housing delivery, as the definition allowed for housing that was not genuinely affordable;
- Concerns about demographic changes, including a significant increase in the population aged 64 and over, which could allow developers to avoid a focus on younger people's needs;
- An acceptance that the HNA simply reflected the direction of housing need that would continue if nothing changed;
- A need for a balanced community, that the HNA could help to achieve;

Following the discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the comments of the Steering Group be approved and that the response to AECOM should emphasis need, the way ahead, the size of properties including HMOs, and tenure.

Light Review Timetable

David Dixon summarised a timetable that had been circulated with the agenda, noting the review period had been extended by three months, as a result of the inclusion of a site options appraisal.

RESOLVED: that the review timetable be noted.

Site Options Appraisal

David Dixon reported that a meeting had been held with AECOM regarding a site options appraisal. The work had focused on sites for social, community-led, and youth housing, with issues from the Workspace and Business Needs Assessment added in. The appraisal would look at all known sites across the area, and at some specific sites in detail. Criteria for a presumption in favour of development would be produced from the work.

Members discussed:

- The possibility of a soundproofed music venue at the Old Dairy site, which Cllr David Worthington would raise with the Steering Group; and
- The emergence of a strategic development corridor from Boldwood House to St Mary's, and the supporting strategic approach needed.

David Dixon advised that the initial work would take place in the coming weeks, and a list of sites would flow from this, picking out the most realistic. Site visits were expected in May and members could attend.

An update on progress with the 'light' review of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 to include:

- Realignment of designated area boundary, ENCL: 3974;
- Progress with Housing Needs Assessment by AECOM;
- BANP Steering Group comments for the Housing Needs Assessment, ENCL: 3975;
- Workspace and Business Needs Draft Report, ENCL: 3976. Abby Gordon-Farleigh of Stir to Action to attend for this item;
- Site Options Assessment funding bid (verbal report); and
- Timetable for completion of the BANP review, ENCL: 3977.

RESOLVED: that the reports of the Project Manager be noted with thanks.

23. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Cllr Sarah Carney advised that she had circulated a paper summarising town councillors' work on housing actions. She wanted to align this work with the

BANP. Discussions in respect of Boldwood House had been positive and development could go ahead soon. Councillors would be grateful for any help the BANP could offer in facilitating this effort.

Cllr Paul Hartmann asked whether the NPJCC factored social infrastructure and community facilities into its approach.

Phyllida Culpin advised that the Steering Group had carried out a lot of work, and that if the Town Council wanted a change of direction on housing, there would be a need to coordinate with the Steering Group to avoid duplication, overlap, or inconsistency.

Cllr Paddy Mooney reported that six brownfield sites had been identified, but some were not suitable for housing. The Bus Station was considered the only realistic site.

24. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED: that the next meeting be held on 22 May 2025 at 10.00am, and that there be four meetings per annum, with future dates to be arranged by the Chairman, in conjunction with the Town Clerk.

The meeting closed at 11.59am.

The next NPJCC meeting is scheduled for 10:00am on 22 May 2025