

Dorset County Local Plan – An Update

Following its formation last year, Dorset County Council has, as one of its mandatory tasks, to create a new Local Plan. The Local Plan dictates, to a great extent, how planning decisions are made across the county. It is subject to consultation and examination by the Planning Inspectorate and forms the framework for Town and Parish Neighbourhood Plans. It will therefore play a very influential part in how our village will develop over the coming decades.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework states that a Local Plan should provide a positive vision for the future through a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities. It should also set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and provide a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.

The Local Plan is scheduled to be produced by Spring 2023 following public consultation in Autumn 2020.

One key element of the Local Plan is a Spatial Strategy. This needs to consider any constraints to development, the relative accessibility of settlements and how the area functions in terms of economic activity, housing markets and the inter-relationship between settlements.

A large part of Dorset is rich in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, so there are geographical constraints upon the types of development that can take place. Government has set Dorset Council a housing requirement of 1,800 new homes per year. In order to set out a framework for development across the county, Dorset Council is creating a "Settlement Hierarchy" which needs to

- Reflect the size and role of each settlement with thought given to its future role
- Identify which settlements are to be the focus for growth
- Estimate growth proportionate to the settlements' relative sustainability, i.e. more sustainable settlements will have more growth and less sustainable settlements will have less growth

The hierarchy will consist of three tiers. The highest tier will consist of two large conurbations, namely a "South East Dorset" area, including Upton and Corfe Mullen and the Dorchester/Weymouth area.

The second tier will consist of towns. These larger settlements are likely to have development boundaries and also sites specifically allocated for development. Within these development boundaries development is generally acceptable, but outside such boundaries – considered countryside - development is controlled.

The two above tiers are the main areas where the majority of growth will be directed. The third tier encompasses the rural areas of the county. Factors favouring development in settlements in this tier are whether they have existing community assets e.g. a village hall, shop, school etc and easy access to employment and the higher tier settlements. It can be considered that the advantages of such rural development are that;

- A mix of good quality housing is essential if a community is to thrive and evolve

- Affordable rural housing provides homes for those who might otherwise be forced to leave their village
- Development gives support for existing infrastructure and can provide enhanced facilities:
 - Broadband
 - Schools
 - Playgrounds
 - Shops

The previous district Local Plans had differing criteria for rural settlements considered suitable for development. The Dorset County Local Plan is attempting to rationalise these criteria into the following:

Settlements with a population above 500 included with consideration given to those that have at least 3 of the following; a school, a doctor's surgery, an employment space, a village shop or a village hall. In addition, these settlements need to have a travel time to the nearest town of less than 30 minutes by public transport or less than 15 minutes by car.

This approach gives a reasonable distribution of settlements across the county, considering existing facilities and supports areas with alternatives to car travel. All of these criteria support the principle of sustainability.

So what does all this mean for Marnhull?

The North Dorset Local Plan (the existing Plan which is relevant for all current planning applications) focuses on development in four major towns (which are included in tier two described above) and on Stalbridge and 18 larger villages in what was the old district. The proposed approach for the Dorset Local Plan widens the scope of development by introducing the third tier described above. By setting a lower population limit of 500 for villages with certain facilities to be suitable for development, the number of villages in focus for development rises to 40.

However, because the area in the Dorset Plan is larger (i.e. the whole county rather than the old North Dorset District), it can be estimated that the 2031 target for the number of new homes will rise from 5,700 to approximately 19,880, if the same portion of the target share is to be allocated to villages. Please note that this is an approximation; the Dorset Local Plan is in its very early stages and no decisions on target share across the three tiers has been decided. However, taking these figures as a working example, Marnhull's share of the target would equate to approximately 72. The current housing target for the district - to be met by 2031 - is approximately 88. Thus, the initial outlook for the new Plan could be a **reduction** in Marnhull's share.

It should be pointed out that in its comments to Dorset Council Planning Department for the four recent large development applications, the Parish Council has maintained that Marnhull's current share is amply covered by existing completed builds and approved applications.

What's next?

As more information regarding the Dorset Local Plan is circulated, further updates will be published as newsletters on this site.