

## Stourpaine Parish Council – response to Dorset Local Plan consultation

This response by Stourpaine Parish Council to the Dorset Council Local Plan consultation has been prepared to focus on aspects of the plan that do or could have an impact on the parish of Stourpaine and its inhabitants. We have not covered many of the more general issues in the plan.

### Section 1 – Introduction

In October 2013, an update to the 2007 Stourpaine Parish Plan was published following a period of extensive consultation and research among the resident population. A range of issues were covered which included asking residents what they liked about living in Stourpaine. A significant proportion of residents (44% of 188 adults responding) stated spontaneously that they considered the surrounding countryside to be very beautiful and access to essential facilities in neighbouring towns is easy.

A comprehensive assessment of the landscape and character of parish of Stourpaine is detailed in the Strategic Landscape and Heritage Study for the North Dorset Area, Assessment of land surrounding the larger villages, Prepared by LUC for Dorset Council, October 2019. As stated in the report *“This study provides robust and up-to-date evidence to feed into the local plan (the current draft Dorset Local Plan) to help inform the scale, form and location of future development to minimise harm to the landscape, heritage assets and the historic character and setting of the settlements within the North Dorset area”*.

This report clearly describes the key landscape features of Stourpaine as follows:

*“The village and its surrounds are located within three different Landscape Character Areas. The east of the settlement and a small area to the north are within the North Dorset Chalk Escarpment Character Area. The river valleys are within the Upper Stour Valley Character Area. A small part of the elevated area to the east of the village is in the Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland Character Area. The whole of the village is within the Dorset AONB”*.

The report gives a lengthy list of statements designed to give “Guidance and opportunities for mitigation” one of which states:

*“Development should seek to preserve or enhance the special architectural and historic interest of the Stourpaine, Durweston and the Blandford, Blandford St Mary, and Bryanston Conservation Areas and the elements of their setting that contribute to this. Since they all have settings that remain rural and contribute to their legibility and significance, opportunity for development that does not result in harm is likely to be very limited, particularly given the surrounding topography. The area between Stourpaine and Durweston conservation areas is particularly unsuitable for development as it would not only be harmful to their significance, but risks merging the two historic settlements”*.

With reference to the draft Dorset Local Plan, Section 1 – Introduction, we have extracted a number of paragraphs relevant to Stourpaine in the consultation process.

*1.3.5. Highly interrelated with climate change is the degradation of the natural environment and for this reason Dorset Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Human influences are leading to exploitation of the natural environment through pollution, land degradation and recreation, which is leading to the decline of a variety of ecosystem services on which life depends.*

This is a key statement of intention from Dorset Council and one which should underpin the Council’s approach to development in Dorset. It is relevant to Stourpaine in that any

developments (infrastructure, housing, employment etc) should respect the natural environment and do what it can to prevent development in areas that are offered protection under the National Planning Policy Framework such as “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty” which envelopes Stourpaine.

*1.3.7. One of the local plan’s priorities is to deliver sustainable development while protecting and enhancing Dorset’s environment and this will be ensured throughout a variety of policies which aim to deliver environmental protection and enhancement. The plan also aims to conserve designated landscapes, including the Dorset and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*

In assessing planning applications which involve attempts to develop land within AONBs, Dorset Council must resist granting permission. Also, it should ensure that areas earmarked for development in the Dorset Local Plan must exclude AONBs. Dorset Council’s record on granting planning permission for development in the AONB is poor. For example:

- in the Blandford area, 350 dwellings on the St Mary’s Hill site, Blandford St Mary (Bellway Homes)
- Vearse Farm, Bridport – 760 houses with additional industrial development and the possibility of the number of houses being expanded to 930 dwellings
- at Littlemoor on the outskirts of Weymouth, 500 houses and other dwellings where West Dorset rapidly is becoming a large city and mostly in the AONB.

*1.3.9. .... The local plan has a role to play in managing flood risk, by ensuring new residential development does not take place in areas at risk of flooding, and that building in one area does not increase flooding risk elsewhere.*

Parts of Stourpaine are susceptible to fluvial, groundwater and surface water flooding. For example, in December 2013, eight properties were severely flooded following the wettest summer and wettest winter on record. After this major flood event, the Environment Agency provided property resilience measures to a number of houses in Stourpaine to help reduce the impact of being flooded.

According to Government statistics, six houses in North Dorset were built on National Flood Zone 3 land i.e. land assessed as having a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding. Although sequential and exception testing was no doubt carried out to comply with NPPF, Dorset Council should ensure that no properties are built of areas at risk of flooding, especially on Zone 3 land.

Although sadly it is history, major reconstruction work was undertaken on behalf of Dorset Council at Durweston Bridge which possibly could have helped to reduce the flood risk in Stourpaine and yet not increased the risk of flooding elsewhere. For some reason, the flood risk assessment undertaken excluded Stourpaine. Neither Stourpaine Parish Council nor the Stourpaine flood wardens were consulted when the scheme was being designed. We strongly recommend that Dorset Council ensures communities are involved well in advance of projects that Dorset Council undertakes where it may be possible to reduce flood risk to properties and infrastructure. This undertaking should be included in the Dorset Local Plan.

*1.3.15. The local plan’s approach to transport comes hand in hand with its spatial strategy for development. Local and national policy aim to locate housing in sustainable locations. Within the context of Dorset’s housing need, sustainable locations include settlements that are situated within 15 minutes’ drive or 30 minutes’ public transport travel time to larger towns. Providing homes in close proximity to these larger towns where employment and services are generally located, will enable residents to travel shorter distances to meet their everyday needs.*

See comments below in 6.7 The transport network.

1.3.29. A significant recent change from central government has been the introduction of the new Enterprise (E) Use Class which merges the previous town centre use classes (such as shops, financial and professional services, restaurants, cafes, gyms, offices etc.) into one. This allows greater flexibility for these types of premises to change between uses without requiring planning consent.

Because of its proximity to Blandford, Stourpaine residents use Blandford as the main shopping centre. Should the retail sector in Blandford be allowed to contract, shoppers will expand their use of internet shopping and will also travel further afield to shop in other retail centres such as in Wimborne, Sturminster Newton, Shaftesbury and Sherborne. Given Dorset Council's aim to permit the building of a very large number of new houses in the Blandford area, the Council must ensure its policies and actions support the growth of the retail sector in Blandford.

## **Section 2 - Development-Strategy**

2.3.14. The villages that fall within Tier 3 and which will therefore have Local Plan Development Boundaries are listed in Figure 2.4. These villages are considered appropriate locations for small-scale infilling to meet their local needs.

With an estimated population of 558<sup>1</sup>, Stourpaine has been classified by Dorset Council as a Tier 3 village. Given the location in the AONB and the river Stour floodplain, there is little room for development if NPPF policies are properly applied. We have already commented on our expectation that building in AONBs should be controlled through adherence to NPPF policies.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019, which Dorset Council conducted, showed only one possible site in the parish of Stourpaine (Shlaa ref: LA/SPAI/001) could be developed subject to a change in policy. An application for 30 houses to be built on that site (2/2020/0178/OUT) was withdrawn following advice from Dorset Council Planning Department. "We considered that the harm clearly identified insofar as landscape and Conservation Area setting, in addition to archaeology and ecology issues and also the fact the proposal would have been contrary to the spatial strategy of the district would have outweighed the benefit of providing 100% affordable housing in this instance".

As such, we would agree with the plan that any development in Stourpaine should be through small-scale infilling and not major developments (major being developments in excess of 10 dwellings).

2.6.17. At the larger villages listed in Figure 2.4 that fall within Tier 3 of the settlement hierarchy, development should:

- take place within local plan development boundaries and (other than where sites have been allocated in this local plan); and
- contribute towards meeting 'local needs' which in this context means development to support a village / group of closely-related villages.

Given the lack of land suitable for development in Stourpaine, we agree that any additional housing should be through windfall and infilling within the existing settlement boundary. This is already taking place with development of the land at Norton View (2/2020/0351/OUT) for five houses being granted in June 2020.

### **DEV6: Development at villages with development boundaries in rural Dorset**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Dorset Council Local Plan, Settlement Hierarchy Background paper - Figure7.2: Villages in Dorset with a population of between 999 and 500 ranked by population

*In rural Dorset beyond the Green Belt and away from large built-up areas, towns and other main settlements, the 'larger villages' (in Tier 3 of the settlement hierarchy) will be the main focus for development. Within local plan development boundaries at the 'larger villages' residential, employment and other development will normally be permitted provided that: it accords with any site-specific policies for the expansion of the village in this local plan; or it contributes to meeting the needs of the local area; and it is at an appropriate scale to the size of the settlement. Within neighbourhood plan development boundaries, residential, employment and other development will only be permitted if it accords with the relevant policies in a neighbourhood plan.*

Given the restrictions mentioned above with regard to development in Stourpaine, we do not agree that Stourpaine should be a "focus for development" in rural Dorset.

## **Section 3 – Environment**

### **ENVV4: Landscape**

*AONB Within an AONB, major development will be refused unless there are exceptional circumstances and it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. Minor development within an AONB or affecting its setting, will only be permitted if:*

- *it does not harm the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB and its setting; and*
- *it does not conflict with and contributes towards the aims and objectives of the relevant AONB Management Plan.*

We have already given our views on permitting development on land designated as being an AONB.

### **3.14. Flood risk**

Our comments on Flood Risk are given above under Section 1.3.9

## **Section 4 – Housing**

This section covers the following strategic policies, none of which we can usefully comment on. Housing "needs" are covered in Section 2, Development Strategy.

- Housing mix
- Affordable housing
- Affordable housing exception sites
- Housing for older people and those with disabilities
- Self-build and custom-build housing
- Second Homes
- Homes in the countryside
- Occupational dwellings
- Other residential development outside development boundaries
- Gypsies, Travellers and travelling showpeople

## **Section 5 – Economy**

This section covers the following strategic policies, none of which we can usefully comment on.

- The supply of employment land and premises

- Key employment sites
- Other employment sites
- Town centres and retail development
- Town centre impact assessments
- Management of Centres and Primary Shopping Areas
- Tourism Developments
- Loss of built tourist accommodation
- Caravan and camping
- Farming and diversification
- Equestrian developments

## **Section 6 – Community Infrastructure**

### **6.7 The transport network**

We understand the latest transport plan for Dorset was completed in 2017. Bournemouth, Poole, Dorset - Local Transport Plan 3, May 2017: LTP3 Implementation Plan Three (2017 - 2020). Given the aim of the Dorset Local Plan is that it should extend from 2021 to 2038, we are surprised that LTP3 which is already three years out of date, has not been updated and used to a far greater extent in supporting the various development policies in the Dorset Local Plan draft.

*6.7.3. In addition to the location of development, the design, layout and connections made to developments will help to facilitate active travel further reducing reliance on the private car. Walking and cycling routes will need to be safe, convenient and easy to use to offer a realistic alternative to car use.*

We are concerned that the safety of walkers is not always observed by some cyclists who consider routes such as the North Dorset Trailway to be their domain. Clearly the situation has been deteriorated during COVID lockdown. Nevertheless, ways must be found to help educate cyclists of the need to observe safe cycling speeds and to warn of their approach when other users are present.

*6.7.6. The provision of the right amount and type of car and cycle parking is key in helping to deliver successful and sustainable developments. In areas of Dorset high levels of car ownership and limited public transport, combined with the rural character of the area, mean that a reduction in parking capacity or further discouragement of parking, would not necessarily discourage car use. A lack of suitable parking can often cause concern and distress in a local community. Pavement parking, obstruction of driveways and damage to soft landscaping and footways are some examples of what can occur as a result of parking problems.*

*6.7.7. Sufficient, quality cycle parking provided in accessible and convenient locations is essential in ensuring that people can undertake active travel with the mental and physical health benefits that this brings.*

See our comments below relating to the North Dorset Trailway

## **Section 28: Northern Dorset Functional Area**

**Figure 9.4: Northern Dorset Functional Area Key Diagram showing local plan allocations.**

This map (and other similar maps), shows Stourpaine to be in the South East Dorset Functional Area. Yet Stourpaine has been grouped in the Northern Dorset Functional Area in Section 2: Development Strategy, Figure 2.4: Tier 3: the larger, more sustainable villages arranged by Functional Area.

## **Section 33: Sturminster Newton**

### **STNW 4 The North Dorset Trailway**

Policies covering the North Dorset Trailway are included in BLAN6: Land adjacent to Ward's Drove (Chapter 7: South Eastern Dorset Functional Area ) and STNW4: The North Dorset Trailway (Section 28: Northern Dorset Functional Area. These cover provision for extending access to the Trailway at St Mary's Hill, Blandford and extending the Trailway from Sturminster Newton to Stalbridge.

There is however, nothing in the development plan to improve access to the trailway through the provision of properly placed car parks nor facilities for users of the Trailway such as toilets. Our experience in Stourpaine is that since the Covid Lockdown, the Village Hall and Sports Pavilion car park is now almost exclusively used by visitors driving into Stourpaine to park and use the Trailway.

Clearly when the Village Hall and Sports Pavilion come back into full use, there undoubtedly will be conflict between those using these facilities for which the car park has been designed and Trailway users. When the new Village Hall was being planned the intention was that the car park would be used by Village Hall and Sports Pavilion customers and not as a car park for large numbers of Trailway users that local residents are now experiencing.

This example, illustrates the need for careful planning of what facilities are needed by Trailway users – planning which must be done in full consultation with those who would live close to such facilities.