



The countryside charity  
Dorset

Date: June 2024

**To: Shane Bartlett Member for Planning and Emergency Planning, Dorset Council**

CC All Dorset Councillors

CC Matthew Prosser, Steven Ford, Matthew Piles

CC Dorset MPs

**Re: Dorset Council Local Plan**

**Dear Councillor Bartlett,**

We welcome you in your new role in the Cabinet as Member for Planning and Emergency Planning. This is of course a critical role in the council which we sincerely hope will lead to a fresh approach to the Local Plan that will make this relevant and responsive to the people of Dorset.

### **Background**

It is now over 3 years since Dorset Council consulted on its draft Local Plan published in January 2021. The plan failed to present a range of options and was deeply unpopular with the public with the majority rejecting the housing strategy at its heart (DEV1). Instead, it presented a pre-decided housing plan with:

- Excessive commercial housing targets - mostly on greenfield sites
- Little to address the needs of local people for truly affordable and social housing
- Developments with a disproportionately damaging effect on Dorset's unique natural and historic environment
- No consideration for the infrastructure impacts.

Back in January 2022<sup>1</sup>, the council leader reflected that "As a result of the unprecedented 9,000 responses our public consultation received, many residents share my view that the draft Local Plan chases housing numbers rather than prioritises local needs."

Following this, the Council presented a summary of the consultation but gave no indication of how they would change the plan to respond to the consultation. The Local Plan was delayed by 2 years in July 2022 to respond to the revised National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Levelling up and Regeneration Act (LURA); and then delayed again by a further year in March 2024 when the council decided to put itself forward as a guinea pig for the new proposed (but not yet fully articulated) Local Plan process.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2022/07/26/dorset-council-local-plan-cabinet-update/#:~:text=We%20are%20reshaping%20the%20new,on%20climate%20and%20ecological%20considerations.>

The original draft Dorset Local Plan has never been withdrawn. In addition, the draft Purbeck Local Plan, which predates the Dorset Local Plan and is also based on exaggerated central housing targets, has been progressing slowly and painfully and remains on the table. Both draft documents continue to influence developers and planning decisions.

The promised position papers from Dorset Council have failed to materialise and it is unclear what contribution the Planning Department have made in the last 3 years. The only substantial new material was Dorset's new Housing Strategy, published in August 2023. This disappointing document was a "visioning statement". It contained no actions or proposed targets and an accompanying "Fact Sheet" that contained exaggerated population growth estimates compared with the Government's published ONS figures.

Furthermore, in a presentation to town and parish councillors in November 2023, the projected "housing need" numbers for Dorset were quoted as 1900 per year – an unjustified increase on the 1797 per year in the draft Local Plan. Under the Standard Method, assessed housing need figures are already inflated 38% by the discredited "affordability uplift", resulting in excessive, unrealistic and damagingly high figures.

There have been, perhaps, two rays of light. Firstly, the UK government's decision to drop the "duty to cooperate", removed the requirement for Dorset Council to meet any unmet housing need in BCP. Secondly, a positive strengthening of the Council's Environmental and Climate Change initiatives including a stronger link between planning and the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy (NECES) along with the "Planning for Climate Change" initiative which introduced the Climate Checklist.

We seek leadership from the new Council to begin an entirely **fresh approach** to the Local Plan that challenges previous assumptions and puts the needs and future of the people of Dorset at its centre. Genuine engagement and consultation with the public are at the heart of a good plan which must be backed up by the required policies and evidence on which the new plan is based.

### **Our Suggestions:**

Dorset CPRE and Dorset Deserves Better will continue to campaign for a fair, community-focussed and progressive Local Plan and we would ask you to consider the following **five key actions** which we believe will support the wellbeing and prosperity of Dorset residents and the conservation and enhancement of our unique countryside and environment:

1. **Withdraw the proposed draft Purbeck Local Plan and the draft Local Plan** (published in January 2021) which are now both hopelessly out-of-date and which continue to set dangerous and incorrect precedents.
2. **Drop the "standard" method for calculating housing need** (which includes the discredited "affordability uplift" of 38%). This is no longer mandatory and Dorset Council now has an unparalleled opportunity to come up with a different approach that reflects our exceptional environmental sensitivity and disproportionate older population. Dorset would not be the first Local Authority to challenge the Standard Method as has been shown recently by BCP Council.
3. **Set a sustainable housing programme which truly reflects Dorset's housing needs.** This must include a specific plan to address the tragic and unjust social housing needs in Dorset. The current model of providing "affordable housing" purely through commercial developments has resoundingly failed. The council is encouraged to use its own land in creative ways, to reinvigorate support for brownfield sites, to avoid using greenbelt and greenfield land wherever possible and to use its compulsory purchase powers when they will benefit the community.

Further support for CLTs and the introduction of a Primary Residence Policy would also support many local communities.

4. **Respond to the environmental emergency by delivering nature recovery** throughout Dorset's countryside, including a transition to regenerative farming and meeting the government's 30x30 commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. The council can also do much more to support local efforts to eliminate dumping of sewage and waste products in our rivers and sea.
5. **Drive towards a thriving Net Zero economy based around 100% renewable energy.** Dorset has an opportunity to introduce local policies on low-carbon developments and renewable energy which will make a material reduction in the carbon footprint of new housing while supporting a growing and productive green economy. These policies should include planning conditions to ensure better insulated housing, rooftop solar on new builds, and the introduction of heat pumps or community heating projects in all new developments. Only 1.5% of Dorset's emissions are within the direct control of Dorset Council. So to address the remaining 98.5% will require working closely with a range of local and national organisations. For example, there is a tremendous opportunity to encourage community energy schemes such as those at Martinstown and Loders to enable their communities to become "Net Zero".

We all want Dorset to be a thriving community, to have a vibrant and sustainable economy, to have a low or zero carbon footprint, to maintain high biodiversity and to remain one of the most beautiful and enchanting areas of the country to live in. The Local Plan is the Council's most influential document when it comes to defining the shape of our future and it is too important to be put together behind closed doors with little or no consultation on its new vision or content.

You have inherited perhaps the most difficult and onerous portfolio in the council. We appreciate that you need time to develop a new way forward but we would welcome an early meeting with you and your key council officers to discuss how your plans can address the concerns of Dorset's communities and our members.

In addition, we would also like to invite you to attend Dorset CPRE's Planning Conference on Zoom entitled 'Dorset's Affordable Housing Crisis?' on 20th June, 1:30pm - 4:30pm. Please click [here](#) to register.

We look forward to your earliest response.

Yours sincerely,

**Neil Matthews**

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### **Dorset CPRE**

Dorset CPRE, the countryside charity, is the local branch of the CPRE – Campaign to Protect Rural England. CPRE has campaigned for almost a century to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone’s benefit, wherever they live. We work with communities, businesses and government to find positive and lasting ways to help the countryside thrive - today and for generations to come. The CPRE, both nationally and locally, contribute to major consultations including strategy, housing, planning and the environment.

### **Dorset Deserves Better**

Dorset Deserves Better (DDB) is an alliance of local organisations campaigning to persuade Dorset Council to rethink the Local Plan in a way that supports local needs and environmental concerns. DDB has the support of 66 organisations across Dorset including 25 Town and Parish councils representing over 30% of residents in Dorset. DDB was set up by the Advocacy Group of Dorset Climate Action Network (DCAN).