

# **West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Examination**

## **Hearing Statement for Matter 4: Housing Policy**



Prepared by West Dorset District Council and  
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

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## **Matter 4: Housing Policy (HOUS 1-7)**

### **Agenda Item 4.1: Are the targets for affordable housing appropriate and is there adequate recognition of viability issues?**

- 1.1 The targets for affordable housing are set out in Submission Plan Policy HOUS 1 Affordable Housing. Specifically this sets a target of a minimum of 25% affordable housing on open market sites in Portland and a minimum of 35% in Weymouth and West Dorset. These different targets reflect the differences in viability between Portland and the rest of the Submission Plan area.
- 1.2 The targets are appropriate as they are established using sound viability evidence and reflect differences in land values. The viability evidence was undertaken in 2012 by BNP Paribas, at a low point in the market. More recently, the sites tested in the 2014 BNP Paribas Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Community Infrastructure Levy viability testing report (CD/CIL17) states that *“Changing market conditions are likely to assist the Council in achieving their policy objective where they are not immediate viable in full”*.
- 1.3 Viability issues are taken into account in two ways. Firstly in setting the percentage threshold, where, as explained in para 1.2 above, detailed viability evidence was used to set the target. Secondly, criterion HOUS1 (iii) makes provision for site specific viability issues to be taken into account in decision-making on individual sites or locations, thus providing flexibility to respond to local circumstances and to consider a lower level of affordable housing provision, if appropriate. Equally, as the policy is expressed as a minimum target, if a scheme comes in which is highly viable then a higher level of affordable housing can be negotiated and secured. Finally, paragraph 5.2.4 in the supporting text makes clear that if the economic situation changes sufficiently, these targets can be reviewed alongside a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- 1.4 There are several developments across the Submission Plan area, of differing sizes and types, currently delivering the required affordable housing contributions of 35%. These include developments at Poundbury, in Dorchester; Floods Yard in Chickerell; and Woodbury Down in Lyme Regis. Developers have also confirmed new developments at Barton Farm, in Sherborne, and Curtis Fields, in Weymouth will be able to deliver the full requirements of 35% affordable housing.

## **Agenda Item 4.2: Is there sufficient flexibility in the tenure objectives for affordable housing provision?**

- 2.1 Criterion HOUS1 (iv) provides guidance in terms of the type of tenure of affordable housing provision which the councils will require. Flexibility is provided in that social and/or affordable rent can make up to a minimum of 70% of the provision, with a maximum of 30% for intermediate housing. As explained in paragraph 1.1.13 of the Submission Plan, the use of the word “should” means in general it is expected that that the policy test will be met but recognises that there may be exceptions made due to specific circumstances. Criterion HOUS1 (iii) also allows for situations where additional information can be provided by applicants to justify a lower level of affordable housing provision.
- 2.2 The creation of the Affordable Rent model has reduced the difference in cost between providing a rented and an intermediate home, therefore requests to change the tenure split need to be evidenced by information on local housing need and demand (for example from the Housing Register or local housing needs surveys). The highest need is currently for rented homes, as demonstrated in the 2014 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The policy split of social rented and affordable rented homes making up 70% of new affordable homes reflects this along with a desire to create balanced and sustainable communities. The policy also provides for flexibility, expressing the targets as maximum and minimum thresholds so that particular local housing needs can be taken into account.

## **Agenda Item 4.3: Is there sufficient detail to show how the Councils will assess potential affordable housing exception sites?**

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in paragraph 55 states that “*To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities*”. Submission Plan Policy HOUS2 provides clear guidance on the approach that the councils will take to assessing proposals for affordable housing exception sites. It makes clear that such sites should adjoin settlements.
- 3.2 The requirement for any proposals to meet an otherwise unmet need for affordable housing, and for the affordable housing to be available to occupiers in perpetuity is also specified. Similarly guidance is provided to ensure that any such development is of a suitable character, scale and design appropriate to the location. This approach is in line with government guidance in paragraph 55 of the NPPF.

- 3.3 The size and tenure of the affordable housing development will be designed to meet an identified local need, the need to promote socially and economically sustainable communities and to create a balanced development with a range of different residents
- 3.4 In the councils' view, therefore, Policy HOUS2 provides sufficient detail to assess proposals for potential affordable housing exception sites.

**Agenda Item 4.4: Is it clear what the approach is to housing beyond settlement boundaries?**

- 4.1 The councils' approach to housing beyond settlement boundaries is set out in Submission Plan Policies SUS2 criterion (iii), SUS3, SUS4 and HOUS6. The councils' approach also complies with government guidance set out in NPPF paragraph 55. These policies reflect the overall strategic approach to development, which, in Section 3.1 of the Submission Plan states that "*...away from existing settlements, development opportunities will be more limited to those activities that will help to continue to support the local economy or help in the long-term management of the countryside and its unique character*".
- 4.2 The Submission Plan recognises that there are a large number of existing rural buildings in the plan area which could provide potential opportunities for redevelopment, without the impact that new development might have on the surrounding landscape. The Submission Plan includes Policies SUS3 and SUS4 to deal appropriately with these types of building.
- 4.3 Criterion SUS2 (i) sets out a clear settlement hierarchy and SUS2 (iii) provides the policy guidance for development proposals outside development boundaries. The development boundaries of all the larger settlements have been carried forward from the previously adopted local plans. The only changes from the previously adopted plans are where defined development boundaries have been extended to accommodate strategic allocations. There is thus clarity about the area beyond settlement boundaries.

**Agenda Item 4.5: Is there a clear direction for addressing Gypsy and Traveller provision consistent with the requirements of national policy (Planning Policy for Traveller Sites)?**

- 5.1 Paragraph 5.6.1 of the Submission Plan clarifies that the strategy for assessing and addressing the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers will be addressed

through the joint Dorset-wide Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Sites Development Plan Document (DPD) process, being prepared in tandem with this Local Plan. The Dorset Councils are working together to produce this DPD which will identify the required provision within each district of allocated permanent and transit pitches and travelling showpeople plots. The approach being taken by the Dorset Councils fully accords with the guidance set out in government guidance in Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (March 2012).

- 5.2 The Dorset-wide Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople DPD was launched in April 2010. Issues and Options consultation was undertaken between November 2011 and February 2012. An update of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment was completed in September 2013. Additional site assessment survey work was undertaken in late 2013/14 and consultation on an Additional Sites Options Report carried out in September/October 2014. Pre-submission consultation is expected in November - December 2015, submission of the DPD in February 2016, public examination at March -July 2016 with adoption estimated to be in December 2016.
- 5.3 Until such time as the Gypsy and Traveller DPD is finalised, decisions on gypsy and traveller sites will be determined in accordance with national policy and with reference to Section 5.6 of the Submission Plan, and policies INT1 and SUS2.