

11. Neighbourhood Plans

- 11.1.1. Communities can have a greater role in shaping the areas in which they live and work by establishing statutory policies through neighbourhood plans. There is no legal requirement for a community to prepare a neighbourhood plan, but it is a right which communities in England can choose to use.
- 11.1.2. Neighbourhood planning has the potential to bring together a local community, landowners and developers, service providers and Dorset Council to build a consensus about the future of an area. Where a town or parish council exists, they should lead on neighbourhood planning. Elsewhere a 'neighbourhood planning forum' must be designated to lead the process.
- 11.1.3. A neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan for an area and sits alongside the Local Plans and other development plan documents we might prepare. Planning applications will be determined using both the Local Plan (once adopted) and any neighbourhood plans that have been 'made' part of the development plan; and by having regard to any other material considerations.

11.2. Strategic priorities and strategic policies

- 11.2.1. National policy indicates that neighbourhood plans should be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider area. Section 2 of this consultation document establishes a Vision for the Dorset Council Local Plan area and identifies a set of Strategic Priorities. Neighbourhood plans should be prepared to positively contribute to the Local Plan's Vision and Strategic Priorities. The final version of the Dorset Council Local Plan will contain a series of strategic policies which will aim to deliver against the strategic priorities.
- 11.2.2. National policy also indicates that neighbourhood plans must be prepared in general conformity with the strategic policies of a local plan. As a result, a neighbourhood plan should not promote less development in the neighbourhood area than is set out in the local plan or undermine the local plan strategic policies.
- 11.2.3. The strategic policies in the Local Plan will be those that contribute towards the delivery of the Strategic Priorities set out in Section 2. All of the proposed housing allocations in the final version of the Local Plan will be strategic in that they will all play a role in contributing towards meeting the housing needs of the plan area. The strategic employment allocations will be those identified as 'key

employment sites'. A few policies may have both strategic and non-strategic aspects.

11.3. Housing requirement figures for neighbourhood plans

- 11.3.1. We are required to set out housing requirement figures for designated neighbourhood plan areas. National policy does not prescribe a methodology for doing this at the neighbourhood level, but explains that strategic policies, such as those that will be included in the Dorset Council Local Plan, should set out *'a housing requirement for neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development, and any relevant allocations'*²⁶ set out in the local plan.
- 11.3.2. The 'housing need' for a local plan area should be determined using the Standard Method. For the Dorset Council area this figure, as set out in Section 4 of this consultation document, is currently 3,246 net additional homes per annum. Over recent years, around 1,660 new homes have been built in Dorset, so this is a significant increase.
- 11.3.3. We outlined the overarching strategy for meeting housing need in this document but the amount of housing that will be required in each neighbourhood plan area is yet to be finalised. As the Local Plan progresses towards adoption, this detail will be fixed.
- 11.3.4. We are likely to present details of housing requirements for neighbourhood plan areas at the point of pre-submission consultation (regulation 19) on the new Local Plan that is scheduled for August 2026. Prior to August 2026, we will take a bespoke approach to providing neighbourhood planning bodies with an indicative housing requirement figure when requested to do so.
- 11.3.5. It is likely that the methodology that will be used to produce housing requirement figures for neighbourhood areas will be similar to the method which we presented as part of the January 2021 Local Plan Consultation. The 2021 consultation document detailed that the proposed housing requirement figures for neighbourhood areas should be the sum of:
 - completions since the beginning of the plan period;
 - extant planning permissions;
 - housing allocations – both existing and proposed;

²⁶ National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024, paragraph 69

- capacity on major sites (10 or more dwellings) within development / settlement boundaries as evidenced through the SHLAA; and
- a windfall allowance on minor sites (less than 10 dwellings) based on recent completion levels

11.3.6. For the purposes of this public consultation, the local plan period is anticipated to begin on 1 April 2026 and, therefore, no completions have yet been recorded. If we use the method which has been outlined, the housing requirement figures will include known allocations in submitted or made neighbourhood plans as well as adopted and emerging local plan allocations. A windfall allowance on minor sites will also be estimated and projected forward to 2043, the end of the local plan period as currently proposed. All data sources will need to be updated as the plan progresses through the plan making process.

Question 33: We have suggested that housing requirements for neighbourhood plan areas should be finalised at the next stage of preparing the Local Plan. This is likely to involve consideration of sites with planning permission, local plan allocations and unplanned development. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach?

- a. Agree
- b. Partially agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Partially disagree
- e. Disagree

Please provide any further comments or reasoning...

11.4. Flexible Settlements Policy

11.4.1. As set out in Section 5 of this consultation document, we propose to introduce a flexible settlements policy that would allow for development of sites up to 30 dwellings adjacent to the built-up edge of settlements that are in Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3 of the settlement hierarchy, subject to certain criteria being met. It is proposed that this policy would apply across the whole of the Dorset Council plan area except for settlements in the Green Belt.

11.4.2. We also propose that the policy would not apply in instances where a neighbourhood plan has been made (adopted) within 5 years of a planning

application being determined and which contains policies and allocations to meet their identified housing requirement.

- 11.4.3. The neighbourhood plan housing requirement figures that we prepare as part of the new Local Plan should be taken as a minimum for a neighbourhood plan area and can therefore be exceeded. However, the scope of a neighbourhood plan is up to a neighbourhood planning body. There is no requirement for neighbourhood plans to allocate sites or identify any additional land to meet housing needs. Nevertheless, there may well be a strong basis for neighbourhood plans allocating sites particularly if there is evidence of local housing need in the neighbourhood plan area. Allocations proposed in neighbourhood plans should be in accordance with the thrust of the spatial strategy set out in the Local Plan and not be strategic in nature.

Question 34: Should the housing requirement figures for neighbourhood plan areas outside the Green Belt, include an allowance for sites that could come forward through the flexible settlements policy?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please provide any further comments or reasoning.