

Dorset Deserves Better Campaign

18th March 2022

Dear Cllr Flower,

We write to you following a meeting of the partners in our Campaign Alliance, who now number 41 community-based organisations and 16 town or parish councils.

They are collectively encouraged by your public statement of late January, and your desire to create a Local Plan that is right for Dorset. They endorse your search for a plan which promotes sustainability rather than chasing housing targets and which recognises the ambitions of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy.

They welcome your approach to Ministers seeking reform of the National Planning Framework, in a way which would prioritise local needs, avoid the obligation to provide for unmet housing need from neighbouring councils, and protect Dorset from speculative housing development while the Plan is completed using the new model. They note that you are seeking an extension of time to prepare a reformed Local Plan.

However, we must tell you that the uncertainty about the Government's response to your request, and about your Council's intentions for the process of re-forming the Local Plan, is causing rising anxiety among the Campaign partners. It is now a full year since the public consultation on the draft Plan was concluded, but no public statement has been made about the findings of that public consultation and what they may imply for the review of the Plan. People are aware of your own wish to change the approach, and to extend the period of Plan-making; and they wish to know what that implies for the way ahead.

Given that there is no guarantee that the government will respond quickly or in full to your requests, the partners are also highly concerned that delay will lead to significant risk of pre-emptive development, as developers seek to bring forward proposals outside the scope of existing approved Local Plans. We have already seen proof of that risk through recent decisions on new housing estates at Gillingham and at Stalbridge in North Dorset.

For these reasons, we urge your Council address the following three key issues as soon as possible:

1. Revised Local Plan Scope and Timetable. Be open and clear about the scope and timetable for the new Local Plan.

- Publish a detailed analysis of last year's consultation exercise and what it implies for review of the proposals in the draft Local Plan
- Publish a timetable for completion of all studies and evidence that underpin the Plan, and publish each piece of the evidence as it is completed.
- Publish the objectives for the new Local Plan and a detailed timetable with the steps required. This should include reviewing the true nature of local need for housing, workspace, amenities and infrastructure, re-calculating the scale of housing required and the types of site suitable for development.

2. Action to reduce the risk of pre-emptive development. Put in place options to prevent a breakdown in the planning process while the new Plan is being developed.

- Bring forward measures to keep existing approved Local Plans up-to-date.
- Explore options to rebuild the 5-year housing supply by promoting housing development that meets local needs and is supported by the community through Neighbourhood Plans or zoned under previous approved Local Plans.
- Monitor and discourage development which is not in approved Local Plans and which would pre-empt a future Local Plan.

- Make it clear to planning committees that pre-emptive development should not be supported and will be fought through the appeals process if necessary.

3. Local Engagement. Start a process to engage local organisations actively in rethinking and rebuilding the Local Plan. You are much more likely to have a Plan supported by the people of Dorset if there is early engagement with local organisations that are representative and trusted.

- Bring forward, and gain public support for a vision for the future of the County which reflects the needs and aspirations of the people of Dorset.
- Restate the central aims of the Local Plan in line with that vision and with the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy (CEES).
- Link the planning process to the CEES by promoting high standards for new developments, retrofitting existing properties, agreeing a renewable energy strategy and ensuring full analysis of environmental impacts.
- Rethink the development strategy at the heart of the Local Plan and settlement hierarchy, taking into account the social and economic links between Dorset and neighbouring counties.
- Recognise the value of existing Neighbourhood Plans and encourage the production of further Neighbourhood Plans.
- Explain DC's thinking about the case for and possible location of a potential new town and consult early and fully with all Dorset communities on their view

Meeting between senior Councillors and the Campaign Alliance

The members of our Alliance are keen to support this process and to meet with you soon to discuss how we may work together to support the development of a new Local Plan. Given the strength of current concerns and the uncertainty in timing of any future government announcement, we see no value in waiting any longer before holding this meeting. An early meeting would do much to allay the uncertainties and to assure the people of Dorset that there is a clear route to the production of a new Plan.

Kind regards

Michael Dower and Giles Watts

On behalf of the partners in the Dorset Deserves Better Campaign Alliance which now consists of 57 organisations representing over **67,000 residents** (16% of the population of Dorset).

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Dorset Deserves Better Campaign

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