



Dorset Climate Action Network
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11th September 2025

Dear Town and Parish Councils, all Councillors, DCAN members and community groups.

As you will be aware, Dorset Council has launched a consultation on the Local Plan which will underpin future housing and development for 17 years from 2026 to 2043. Dorset Council and its Ward Councillors have rightly called on residents, town and parish councils and local societies to “have your say” by **responding to the Council before the 13th October deadline**. Details can be found [here](#).

What sort of Plan is proposed ?

We all know that our communities need some development to support economic and community growth. This includes both market and affordable homes. But these need to reflect genuine local need not an arbitrary central government target. Dorset has been set an excessive and undeliverable target of 3246 houses per year or 55,000 over the 17 year term of the plan. This is nearly twice the previous target and almost three times Dorset’s average rate of house building of around 1,300 houses per year.

Developers will simply not build what they cannot profitably sell. Any Local Plan based on unachievable housing numbers would soon fail the government’s housing delivery test and result in a planning free-for-all under the so-called presumption in favour of sustainable development. This would allow developers to cherry pick sites throughout Dorset and severely weaken the Council’s ability to control development.

What will be the consequence of this Plan?

The tragedy is that these high numbers will not actually address Dorset actual housing crisis – the lack of truly affordable or social housing for local low-income key workers. Setting such aggressive targets for total house numbers will not accelerate the building of affordable housing. Developers will argue that such housing is not viable to enhance their profits. Nor will it lower house prices which are much more strongly influenced by interest rates and earnings. Instead, such excessive targets threaten sprawling developments built on the edge of nearly every town or village in Dorset without any corresponding investment in infrastructure, services or facilities like roads, bus services, surgeries and dentists.



In addition, the threat to our countryside, our environment, our green belt and greenfield locations are real and potentially very damaging. Unconstrained development would just lead to further congestion and gridlock on our roads and a significant increase in our carbon footprint. This would make us a stronger contributor to global warming, wildfires, sea level rises, flooding and a host of unpredictable and violent weather patterns. We must take responsibility for our own contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

What does the council think about the housing targets ?

Dorset Council has itself said that the government's annual target of 3246 houses a year is an unrealistic and unachievable basis for the Dorset Local Plan. They are well aware any Local Plan based on excessive housing numbers will not be delivered and so will fail the government's Housing Delivery Test, leading to a developer-led free-for-all and loss of local planning control.

What exactly have Dorset Council proposed in their Site Options ?

Dorset Council have produced a (Regulation 18) sites-based consultation which includes up to 70,000 houses over the plan period – 15,000 more than is required. These sites are ones which have either been suggested by landowners and developers or by the Council itself – sometimes without the knowledge of the landowner. This list of sites has not undergone proper screening, viability assessment or full modelling of available social or road and services infrastructure. It is accompanied by a Sustainability Assessment that appears to score incorrectly many sites as having sustainable infrastructure. Indeed, many of the sites contradict the council's own Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) that was published in 2024 and declared many of the sites unsuitable for development. See [here](#).

What can we do ?

We urge all councillors to engage in the consultation process and to try to encourage their constituents to respond. Poor quality and unsustainable sites for housing developments must be called out by local people who know the area and understand the local issues. This is not an attempt to stop all development. Instead, it is a logical response to the Council to be more carefully selective about which sites really meet local demand and favour local communities better.

We urge Town and Parish Councils, Local Societies, Action Groups and residents to respond in the following way:

1. **Comment on all sites in your local area.** Make sure your view of the suitability and sustainability of these sites are heard. Consider what impact these sites would have on local peoples as well as on the people who will live there and become your neighbours.
2. Consider suggesting alternative sites that might be better, especially brownfield ones, which generally tend to be closer to shops, services and facilities such as schools, hospitals, surgeries, youth clubs etc and are more likely to support public transport and healthier active travel.
3. Consider the impact on the area around you – the proximity to heathland, nature protection sites and designated areas; the impact on the landscape and the historical context. How it may affect sensitive habitats and biodiversity; whether there is a suitable water source and



sewerage facilities; and the impact on reducing quality farming land that is being used to help feed the nation.

4. Ask whether these developments will provide a significant number of affordable and social rental houses, community-led co-housing projects, Community Land Trusts or houses for self-build or shared ownership which will support young people and families starting out on the property ladder.
5. Dorset Council proposes removing settlement boundaries and replacing with a “flexible settlements policy” to make it easier to add housing development on the edge. This is very dangerous change since the settlement boundaries are there to protect us from sprawling developments away from community centres and to make sure there is a protective green “ring” around our communities to prevent towns and villages from merging with each other and losing their distinctive character. Let them know what you think about this latest proposal.

How can we help each other?

Many environmental and community organisations will be preparing their own responses to Dorset Council’s Local Plan consultation and will appreciate seeing the communities’ views. If you are a councillor, please let us know what your council decides about the sites in your area. A useful way to classify sites is to rate them as:

- a) Blocked Sites - with clear reasons why they are unsuitable for development
- b) Constrained Sites - with clear statement on what conditions would be required for them to be suitable for development: e.g. social housing, new access, transport infrastructure, new water supply, density constraints etc.
- c) Enabled Sites – site which would strengthen the community and be acceptable for development.

You may also like to keep in touch with news during coming weeks on our website and social media.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Giles Watts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Giles Watts – Chair

Dorset Climate Action Network

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