

Local Plan consultation summary

Introduction

S1. Welcome to the public consultation on the New Forest District Local Plan Review for the area outside of the National Park. Local Plans set out policies for the use, development or protection of land and buildings.

S2. This is your chance to have your say at an early stage in the **Local Plan Review Part One**, our planning strategy, strategic policies and key development sites for the period 2016 to 2036. The main focus of this consultation is potential locations for new housing based on the evidence we have collected so far. We have some difficult choices to make, with potentially significant consequences if we fail to address these challenges positively. Our decisions must be based on evidence and this will be independently tested by the government. No decisions will be made until we have considered your views and completed our evidence gathering.

Why review the Local Plan?

S3. There is a broad consensus between the national political parties that England needs to build around 250,000 new homes per annum to meet its needs. Yet average housing delivery rates have been well short of this level for the last three decades. The government has significantly reformed the Planning system to help tackle this situation.

S4. Councils are legally required to produce a Local Plan for their area and to keep them up-to-date. Our current Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted in 2009 well before the recent and ongoing planning reforms.

S5. A central aim of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (2012) is to achieve a step change in housing delivery, and to meet housing and other development needs in full unless it is demonstrably unsustainable to do so. There is a stronger emphasis on the significant social and economic benefits of providing enough housing, to be weighed in the balance with environmental and landscape considerations to achieve sustainable development.

What does this mean for us?

S6. Most of southern England is facing the challenge of providing more housing, and we are no exception although our population dynamics are different. Our [Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#) (SHMA), a key part of our evidence, recommends that we provide 587-687 homes per annum. This equates to 11,740-13,740 homes in the Plan period 2016–2036, 3-4 times the current annual target of 196 homes.

S7. This figure is driven by a 22,000 projected increase in population 2016-2036. All of this projected growth is in the 65+ age groups, and the working age population is projected to decline by 2,200. The main contributor is internal migration within the UK e.g. for retirement. All net international in-migration is projected to contribute less than a fifth of the growth so the need for housing is **unlikely to be significantly affected by the recent decision to leave the European Union**.

Potentially sustainable locations for new housing

S8. We have carried out a comprehensive sustainability appraisal of all land in the district to identify all potentially suitable locations for new homes. We have taken into account a wide range of factors such as access to facilities, landscape sensitivity and constraints such as flood risk, coastal erosion, protected habitats and industrial hazards.

S9. Our sustainability appraisal takes a neutral position on the status of land as Green Belt in our judgement about whether a location is potentially sustainable for housing. It is important to understand why.

S10. Based on our knowledge of our rural District and its significant environmental and other constraints we anticipated that there would not be enough land in sustainable locations outside the Green Belt to meet our housing needs. So the possibility of development in the Green Belt was something we should at least investigate to weigh up the pros and cons.

Green Belt is a planning policy designation. It is different from ‘green field’ land, which is simply a generic description of land that has not been previously built on. Most green field land is not designated as Green Belt.

Green Belt is often misunderstood. It has nothing to do with the quality, attractiveness or ecological value of the land. Green Belts are locally made and only established in exceptional circumstances. Their main purposes are to keep open countryside open, and to prevent urban sprawl including the merging of large urban areas. However, if settlements in Green Belt need to grow, some loss of undeveloped countryside is inevitable. There is an important difference between selective, planned land release and uncontrolled sprawl.

Within New Forest District, the South West Hampshire Green Belt covers the area south of Ringwood to Christchurch and between Christchurch and Lymington. Land in the New Forest National Park (a separate Local Plan area) is not Green Belt. National Parks and AONB boundaries are set by an Act of Parliament and cannot be changed by a Local Plan.

Whilst an important policy, Green Belt boundaries can be changed through a Local Plan review. Land can be released from the Green Belt for development in exceptional circumstances. Elsewhere the courts and planning inspectors have accepted that the lack of other suitable land to meet housing needs can be an exceptional circumstance. The extent of housing supply shortfall relative to need is a relevant consideration.

S11. Map S1 shows the initial results of our work to date assessment, all the potentially sustainable locations for 100 or more homes. There is further work to do before deciding whether they should be allocated for development in the Local Plan.

S12. Our initial estimate of the total housing capacity of the district including all these sites and existing commitments is 10,040 homes. This is 1,700-3,700 homes (14-27%) below the range of housing need identified by the SHMA, even if potentially sustainable sites in Green Belt are included. We will need to work with neighbouring areas to consider whether this shortfall can be addressed elsewhere in the housing market areas.

Considering development in the Green Belt

S13. To help with our consideration of the case for releasing land from the Green Belt for development we commissioned an independent study of the Green Belt. The study assesses the extent to which land in the Green Belt still serves its main purposes to preserve open countryside and prevent urban sprawl, taking into account development since the Green Belt was originally established.

S14. We then compared the performance of land in Green Belt to its performance in terms of sustainability. Other things being equal, the release of weakly performing Green Belt would be preferable to releasing strongly performing Green Belt. However there is no convenient correlation. Some of our more sustainable locations for potential development also perform strongly as Green Belt. This leaves us with a difficult choice to make: whether or not to release more “strongly” performing Green Belt land for development to better address housing needs in the most sustainable way.

S15. If we choose not to release land in the Green Belt we have two main options. Both significantly increase the risk that the Local Plan would not pass Government examination with potentially serious consequences.

S16. The first is to allocate more land for development outside the Green Belt despite the fact that based on our evidence so far that there are no more locations suitable for development without significantly harming the environment.

S17 The second option is to submit a Local Plan that falls very significantly short of meeting housing need because we consider protecting the Green Belt to be more important than housing our future population. If we rule out locations in Green Belt, we can only meet 47% of our housing need, a 6,700 homes shortfall. If we made full use of sustainable sites in Green Belt, we could meet 79% of our needs and accommodate 4,000 more of our future households.

What might happen if we fail to plan positively?

S18. Government has set a target that by early 2018 all councils should have published a Local Plan that is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012). We are well placed to achieve this. But if we did not, Government has the power to step in and produce a Local Plan for us.

S19. It is also important that we produce a Local Plan that meets the requirements of Government policy. The most common reasons for Local Plans to fail at independent Examination stage are not providing enough housing and failing to fully consider options to increase housing supply.

S20. Where a Local Plan fails at Examination, a new Plan has to be produced, and it is on public record that the previous Local Plan is out-of-date in terms of housing supply. In these circumstances developers can submit speculative planning applications that must be determined using more permissive national policies, where significant weight is given to the lack of housing supply in deciding whether development is sustainable.

S.21 There are other consequences if not enough new homes are provided. The affordability of housing is likely to worsen, which would disproportionately affect younger people wishing to remain in the area. Our projected decline in working age population could be made even worse, with consequences for local businesses and higher levels of inward commuting that could affect road congestion and the local environment.

S.22 The housing growth needed will be bought forward one way or another. Our view is that better outcomes will be achieved by planning positively, where we decide where growth will go, what form it will take and the facilities and infrastructure to be provided alongside new homes.

The benefits of growth

S23. Debates about housing development are often unduly negative, dominated by understandable concerns about change in a local area

perceived to affect individual quality of life. But we all live in homes on land that was once undeveloped. Good plan-making is also about creating attractive and good quality places to live with amenities and services all residents can benefit from. These will include significant new areas of public open space and land for recreation, and are likely to also include new community and commercial facilities and employment.

Next steps

S24. Your comments will help us to refine our initial proposals into detailed policies and development site allocations. This will include a full assessment of the infrastructure, facilities and services required to accommodate new homes in a sustainable way and to meet the needs of future residents.

S25. We will consult you again in the late Spring of 2017 on our final draft proposals. The draft Local Plan will then be submitted for public Examination by an independent planning inspector appointed by the Government. If the Local Plan is found sound it will be adopted by the Council. Once adopted it is the legal basis for deciding whether to approve planning applications for development.

Find out more and have your say

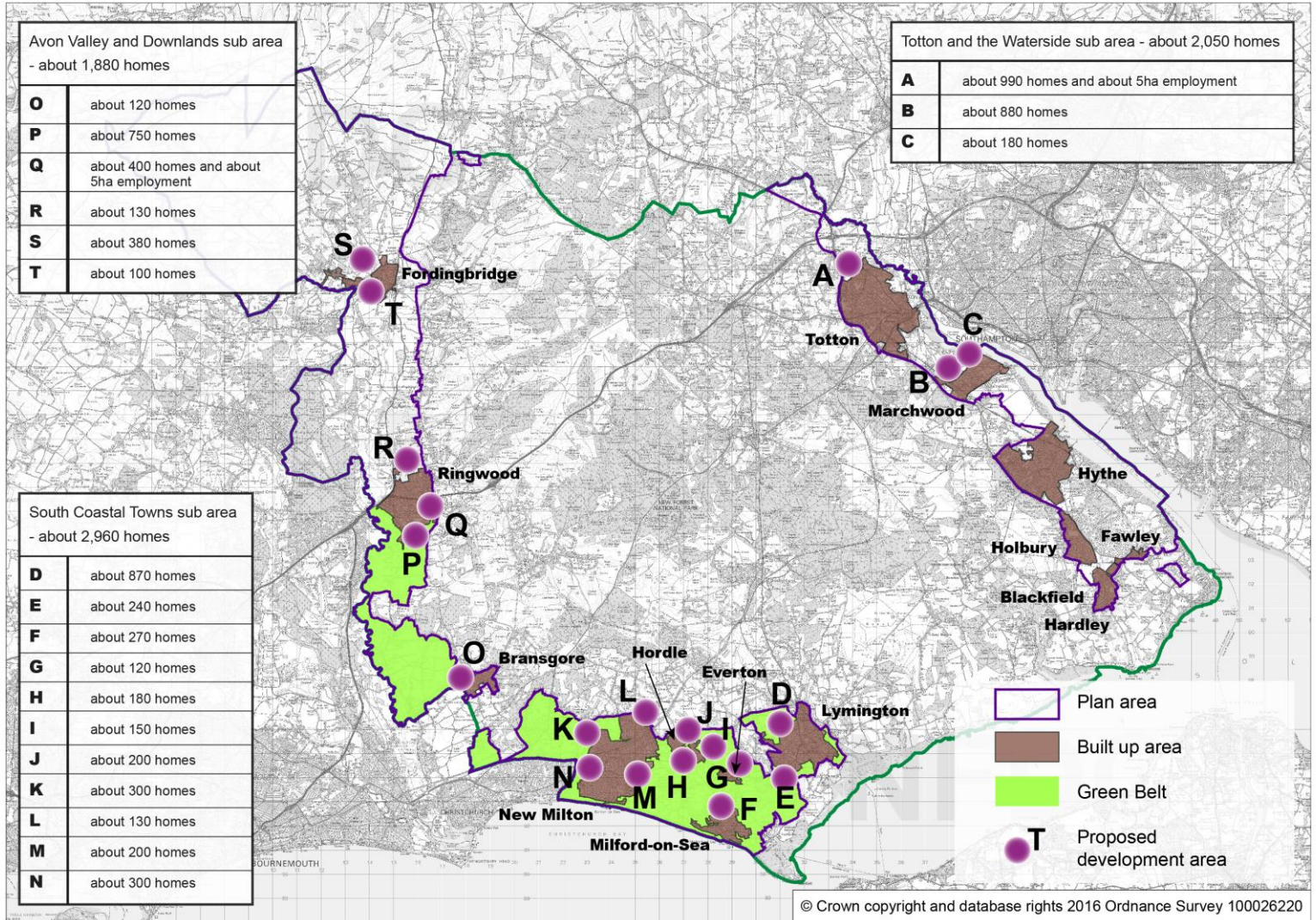
S26. Please take the time to read this summary and the full consultation document to understand what we are proposing, why and how to respond.

S27. Visit our website for more information about the Local Plan Review and this public consultation, including answers to Frequently Asked Questions. www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016

S28. Attend any of our 4:00pm - 7:30pm drop-in sessions in Totton (25 July 2016), Fordingbridge (26 July 2016) and Lymington (27 July 2016) to talk with a planning officer, or contact the Planning Policy team.

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Map S1: Potential sustainable locations for 100+ homes