

Explanatory Notes and Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Local Plan?

- A Local Plan sets out a vision for the district and identifies the land and infrastructure which will be required in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure. It also includes policies to protect and enhance the natural and historic environment, and to secure good design. Once completed it is the legal basis for deciding planning applications. All local authorities with planning powers are required to prepare a Local Plan.
- This 'Initial Proposals' document has been published as part of the Local Plan Review to give residents, businesses and other interested parties an early opportunity to help shape the future planning of the New Forest district area outside the National Park, for the period 2016 to 2036.
- The main focus of the document is on potential sites for future housing development. We also outline our initial thoughts on a number of other strategic policy matters, although there is a significant amount of work to complete before the Local Plan is finalised. This includes detailed planning for the infrastructure, amenities and services that will be needed alongside new homes.

How can I comment?

- The Local Plan consultation document and supporting evidence can be viewed at www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016.
- Alternatively printed copies of the Local Plan consultation document can be viewed at Council offices in Lyndhurst (Appletree Court) and Lymington Town Hall, and in public libraries in Totton, Hythe,

Blackfield, Lymington, Milford-on-Sea, New Milton, Ringwood and Fordingbridge.

- You can complete our online consultation survey, and/ or make more detailed comments using our downloadable Consultation Form. Both are available at www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016.
- All comments must be submitted by **4pm on Friday 16 September 2016**.
- Your comments will help us to work these up into detailed policies in the next stage of plan preparation.

What are the next steps for the Local Plan and what is the timetable for completion?

- We will prepare a full publication version of the Local Plan Part One taking account of comments received. We aim to publish this version in the spring of 2017 for consultation.
- The publication version and any comments made are then submitted to the Government who will arrange an independent public hearing to consider whether the Local Plan meets national policy and other legal and procedural requirements. The timetable after submission is dependent on the Planning Inspectorate.
- More information about the Local Plan timetable can be found in our Local Development Scheme:
<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=21693&p=0>

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What is the district's housing need?

- The housing need for the New Forest district is at least 600 new homes each year, for twenty years, compared to our current Local Plan target of 200.
- This figure is not a final Local Plan housing target. The plan-making process sets a target taking into account sustainable development including constraints on the supply of suitable development land. But it is our responsibility to do everything we reasonably can to meet as much of this need as we can.
- More information can be found in our Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014:
<http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=30253&p=0>

Why are a higher number of houses being proposed now than in the existing Local Plan?

- The current Local Plan has a strategy of 'development restraint' based on previous national and regional policies. It does not seek to meet the area's needs within the district boundary.
- Central government has made substantial changes to national planning policy. National policy now requires Local Plans to significantly boost the supply of new homes. Local Plans should make every possible effort to meet the various forms of market and affordable housing need in full unless the harm in doing so demonstrably outweighs the benefits or national policies restrict development.

- Our current Local Plan is therefore no longer compliant with national planning policy and so a review is necessary. Our Local Plan needs to comply with national planning policy, in particular with making every effort to meet as much of the 'identified housing needs' as possible.

What is causing the need for more housing?

- Demand for housing is growing nationally, with an increase in the population and people living longer, and that is echoed in the New Forest district area which is also a popular place to move to.
- The type of housing required is changing – with growing demand for more homes for single people, homes suitable for older people, as well as homes that are affordable for younger people and growing families.

Is it necessary to plan for such a high level of housing? Can the Council not just say 'no' because this amount of housing is not appropriate near the New Forest?

- The government wants all councils to make every effort to meet their objectively assessed housing need in full. But national policy also recognises that some places are more sensitive environmentally or face other constraints that limit the potential supply of suitable land for development.
- The plan-making process decides where growth should go, and in constrained areas establishes the right balance between meeting housing and other needs and environmental protection. This decision is made by careful consideration of evidence to test

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different sites and housing supply options, considering for example the risk of flooding and potential for harm to protected nature conservation sites. Finding the right balance between the social and economic benefits of the development needed and its environmental consequences to avoid significant or lasting harm is what planners mean by the term 'sustainable development'.

- Given the number of land sensitivity constraints in New Forest District (outside the National Park) it appears likely that we will not be able to meet housing need in full, but we must produce robust evidence to demonstrate why we cannot.
- Every Local Plan that is produced has to conform to national planning policy and Government guidance. We do not have a choice regarding this. Our aim is to prepare a Local Plan that strikes the right balance between meeting our housing needs and protecting existing communities and sensitive areas. The alternative would be for developers to submit planning applications for new housing development anywhere across the district in locations not chosen by the Council, and it would be difficult for us to refuse these applications.

How have the potential sites for development been chosen?

- Potential new sites for development have been identified through a comprehensive process which has assessed every parcel of undeveloped land in the district in order to establish its suitability for potential new development.

- Sites have been assessed for suitability through a number of criteria that consider the social, economic, and environmental benefits and consequences that developing the site would bring.
- There is not enough suitable 'brownfield' land in the district to meet future development needs so we have to find 'greenfield sites' on the edges of our towns and villages which might be suitable for development.
- There are various constraints on some of the land in the area which rules it out for development, for example, protected nature conservation sites, and land that is liable to flood.
- With the supply of potentially suitable development land being so limited we have also looked for possible opportunities in the Green Belt.
- More information can be found in our Draft Sustainability Appraisal Annex 1 - Site Assessments: www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016

What is meant by 'Greenfield land' and 'Green Belt land'?

- When land is referred to as a 'greenfield site' this means it is land in the countryside that has not previously been developed and is beyond the boundary of a town or village. Sometimes this 'countryside' land also has more specific environmental designations to protect it from development because of its natural beauty or importance to wildlife.
- Green Belt is a policy designation and not all green field sites are Green Belt, in fact most are not. Land is designated as Green Belt

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to prevent development sprawl around some large urban areas. Green Belt is not based on the natural beauty or intrinsic quality of the landscape.

- These images show some examples of Green Belt and non-Green Belt land:



Why is development being considered on the Green Belt?

- Our search for suitable sites for future development has concluded that sites within the Green Belt need to be seriously considered as there is not enough land outside of the Green Belt to meet 'identified needs'.

- The National Planning Policy Framework says we can only consider releasing land for development from the Green Belt in very special circumstances, where the benefits of the development outweigh the loss of some Green Belt land.

Our schools/doctors/roads/other facilities are already overcrowded. Why is more development being proposed?

- Proposals for growth and development often raise understandable concerns about the capacity of existing infrastructure such as roads, public transport, sewers, schools and health facilities.
- The next stages of the Local Plan process will assess the impacts of growth on local infrastructure, services and facilities, and will put in place policies to ensure sufficient new facilities and infrastructure are provided to meet the needs of new communities. We are working closely with Infrastructure Providers (e.g. healthcare providers, water and sewerage providers, and bus companies) in order to understand where there may be issues of capacity, and to identify the local infrastructure, services and facilities needed to support new development.
- But it is also important to have realistic expectations about what the planning system can achieve and to prioritise what is necessary rather than aspirational. The planning system is not able to solve existing problems; these are the responsibility of the service providers. The planning system can only address the additional consequences or impacts of new development.

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House prices are a significant issue in this district. What will the Council do to increase the supply of affordable housing?

- Central government has recently introduced significant reforms to this aspect of housing which will affect what we are able to do in terms of securing affordable housing contributions from developers.
- The Housing and Planning Act 2016 requires that at least 20% of new homes should be provided as starter homes for purchase by younger first time buyers at a discount of at least 20% of the market price. All other forms of affordable housing sought would have to be funded from any remaining surplus in site value after the developer takes a fair profit.
- Recent changes to National Planning Practice Guidance mean that local authorities are no longer able to seek affordable housing contributions on sites of 10 homes or fewer.
- A pending Viability Assessment will establish what we are able to do in terms of the target percentage of affordable housing to be sought from developments and whether there is any scope to seek the provision of any other tenures of affordable housing in addition to the compulsory requirement for starter homes.

What about jobs/employment/business needs?

- The district has relatively low business demand for large scale employment development and because the future working age population is projected to fall, there is not a strong case to promote business development to provide more jobs. However, there are

needs for smaller and flexible premises for smaller local businesses to expand into.

- The draft Local Plan consultation document proposes three employment land allocations (approximately five hectares each) for the provision of small business and starter units in particular.

What role can Neighbourhood Planning have?

- Neighbourhood Plans allow local communities to shape development in their area. They play a complementary role to Local Plans and give local communities the opportunity to set and pursue local priorities and standards. For example, Neighbourhood Plans could allocate additional sites for housing or other development to meet local needs or aspirations.
- Neighbourhood Plans must generally conform to National and Local Plan policy and cannot be used as a means to block development or put in place policies that conflict with adopted Local Plan policies or national guidance.
- To date five Town or Parish councils have 'designated' their area and intention to prepare Neighbourhood Plans: Hythe and Dibden, Lymington and Pennington, Milford-on-Sea, New Milton, and Totton and Eling. In finalising the Local Plan the District Council will take into account what policy matters these areas propose to cover in their own Neighbourhood Plans.