

Planning Policy

Our Ref: SJ/Strategic Approach

Ask for: Sarah Jennings

Date: 28 November 2011

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Dear Town and Parish Council Members

TAKING FORWARD GROWTH IN THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES OF NORTH DORSET

The Government is changing the way we plan. On 15 November the Localism Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act giving local communities new rights and powers to prepare neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders. The Act also enables regional plans and their associated housing targets to be abolished.

These changes, together with the publication of the Draft National Planning Policy Framework, have given the Council an opportunity to try and develop a more flexible, locally based approach to development in the District. There is still a need to plan strategically to support economic growth, improve people's quality of life and protect the natural environment but now there are a number of policy options for growth that give a greater choice at the local level, particularly in Stalbridge and the villages.

In summary the choice at a local level for Stalbridge and the villages are:

Option 1 – The Council gives a strong strategic steer in Stalbridge and the larger villages with greater choice elsewhere

Option 2 – The Council gives a strong strategic steer in Stalbridge and a more limited number of larger villages with greater local choice elsewhere

Option 3 – The Council gives 'light touch' strategic guidance only with greater local choice in Stalbridge and all villages

The enclosed document gives more information on each of the above options. It also gives a brief introduction into neighbourhood planning. The Council would welcome the views of town and parish councils as to their preferred option, but at the same time would also appreciate an insight into the appetite of local communities for getting involved in neighbourhood planning.

To help town and parish council members understand the options and enable informed discussion at a local level a **drop in session** has been arranged for **18 January 2012** between **2pm and 7pm** at the Council offices in Blandford. Here planning officers will be available to answer questions and clarify what each option means for a particular village.

To further help town and parish councils generate local interest in neighbourhood planning, the Council will shortly be issuing a press release on the topic of neighbourhood plans in which it will suggest that any person or organisation interested in preparing a neighbourhood plan should contact their town or parish council as, under the legislation, it is the town or parish council which is the qualifying body for initiating neighbourhood plans. Individual councils may also find it useful to place notices locally in village newsletters and on noticeboards to raise awareness of neighbourhood plans in their local community.

Following the drop-in session, town and parish councils will have plenty of time to discuss the options and consider if their local community is interested in preparing a neighbourhood plan as the responses to these questions do not need to be returned until the **29 February 2012**. If the answer at this time is 'no' to a neighbourhood plan it will not stop local parishes from pursuing this option sometime in the future.

If, in the meantime, you have any questions please do not hesitate to call the Planning Policy Team on 01258 484201.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Jennings
Planning Policy Officer

Email: sjennings@north-dorset.gov.uk

Direct Line: 01258 484362

Fax: 01248 484000

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