Joint Local Plan Review for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE BACKGROUND PAPER

ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION VERSION

FEBRUARY 2017

Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Contents

1. Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE BACKGROUND PAPER

1.1 This document is one of a number of background papers produced to support the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review.

1.2 This paper provides a general overview of issues relevant to green infrastructure. It is a working document which will be updated as evidence is acquired and the consultation process proceeds.

LOCAL PLAN AND THE REVIEW

1.3 In October 2015, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council adopted their Joint Local Plan[1]. The Local Plan sets out a long term planning strategy for the area and includes detailed policies and site proposals for housing, employment, leisure and infrastructure. The adopted Local Plan is the main basis for making decisions on planning applications.

1.4 In his report on the examination of the Joint Local Plan[2], the Inspector indicated that he considered it to be "imperative that an early review is undertaken". The objective of the review is to identify additional housing land capable of meeting housing need to 2036, identify a long-term strategy for development in the Dorchester area by 2021; and reappraise housing provision in Sherborne.

1.5 At the same time as the Review is underway there are opportunities to clarify the interpretation of existing policies.

[1] https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/jointlocalplan/west/weymouth
[2] https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/421782/West-Dorset-Weymouth--Portland-Adopted-Local-Plan-Inspectors-Report

2. National Policy and Guidance

2.1 National policy on green infrastructure is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (CD/OKP1), with additional guidance provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

NATIONAL PLANNNG POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

2.2 The NPPF has adopted the concept of adaptation as a means of delivering sustainable development and the appropriate planning of green infrastructure is an integral part the land use planning system for England. The relevant parts of the NPPF are set out below:

Para 99 Local Plans should take account of climate change over the longer term, including factors such as flood risk, coastal change, water supply and changes to biodiversity and landscape. New development should be planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change. When new development is brought forward in areas which are vulnerable, care should be taken to ensure that risks can be managed through suitable adaptation measures, including through the planning of green infrastructure

Para 109 The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
- remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Para 113 Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and

gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks

Para 114. Local planning authorities should:

- set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure; and
- maintain the character of the undeveloped coast, protecting and enhancing its distinctive landscapes, particularly in areas defined as Heritage Coast, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the coast.

Para 117 To minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should:

- plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;
- identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;
- promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;
- aim to prevent harm to geological conservation interests; and
- where Nature Improvement Areas are identified in Local Plans, consider specifying the types of development that may be appropriate in these Areas.

PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE (PPG)

2.3 The PPG reiterates the aims of the NPPF, and amongst other things provides guidance on the definition of green infrastructure.

2.4 It is defined as a *"network of multifunctional green space urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities."* As a network it can include parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments, private gardens, streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.

2.5 Green infrastructure can help deliver a variety of planning policies The multiple and far reaching benefits of a green infrastructure network are listed in paragraph 29, these benefits include;

- **Building a strong, competitive economy** – Green infrastructure can drive economic growth and regeneration, helping to create high quality environments which are attractive to businesses and investors.
- **Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes** – Green infrastructure can help deliver quality of life and provide opportunities for recreation, social interaction and play in new and existing neighbourhoods. More broadly, green infrastructure exists within a wider landscape context and can reinforce and enhance local landscape character, contributing to a sense of place. Green infrastructure is also an important approach to delivering ecosystem services and ecological networks.
- **Requiring good design** - Well-designed green infrastructure helps create a sense of place by responding to, and enhancing, local landscape character. Green infrastructure can also help create safe and accessible environments in new development and the regeneration of brownfield sites in existing built up areas.
- **Promoting healthy communities** - Green infrastructure can improve public health and community wellbeing by improving environmental quality, providing opportunities for recreation and exercise and delivering mental and physical health benefits. Green infrastructure also helps reduce air pollution, noise and the impacts of extreme heat and extreme rainfall events.
- **Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change** – Green infrastructure can help urban, rural and coastal communities mitigate the risks associated with climate change and adapt to its impacts by storing carbon; improving drainage (including the use of sustainable drainage systems) and managing flooding and water resources; improving water quality; reducing the urban heat-island effect and; where appropriate, supporting adaptive management in coastal areas. Green infrastructure networks also help species adapt to climate change by providing opportunities for movement.
- **Conserving and enhancing the natural environment**- The components of green infrastructure exist within the wider landscape context and should enhance local landscape character and contribute to place-making. High quality networks of multifunctional green infrastructure provide a range of ecosystem services and can make a significant contribution to halting the decline in biodiversity.

2.6 To assist in planning positively for green infrastructure local planning authorities may wish to prepare an authority-wide green infrastructure framework or strategy. This should be evidence- based by, for example, including an assessment of current green infrastructure provision that identifies gaps in the network and the components and opportunities for improvement. The assessment can inform the role of green infrastructure in local and neighbourhood plans, infrastructure delivery plans and community infrastructure levy schedules.

2.7 The strategic approach to green infrastructure may cross administrative boundaries. Therefore neighbouring authorities, working collaboratively with other stakeholders including Local Nature Partnerships (LNP's) and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP's) may wish to consider how wider strategies for their areas can help address cross-boundary issues to help meet the duty to co-operate.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHITE PAPER

2.8 The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature June 2011 outlines the government's vision for the natural environment, shifting the emphasis from piecemeal conservation action towards a more integrated landscape scale approach. It also sets out how we can better value the natural environment in decision-making and thereby unlock growth in the green economy and reconnect people with nature.

2.9 Nature Partnerships were a key white paper commitment as consultation identified the need for local areas to work in a joined up and strategic way to help manage the natural environment to produce multiple benefits for people, the economy and environment. This was also echoed in the UK National Ecosystem Assessment which emphasised the need for an integrated, landscape led approach to managing the natural environment.

2.10 The Local Nature Partnerships are self sustaining strategic partnerships made up of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who can influence other strategic decision makers.

2.11 The Dorset Local Nature Partnership was officially recognised by government in 2012.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL COMMUNITIES ACT 2006

2.12 Natural Environment and Rural communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) gives a duty to public authorities in England to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat. This duty can be demonstrated if the authority has identified ways to integrate biodiversity when it amongst other functions has developed policies and strategies and put them into practices.

BIODIVERSITY 2020: A STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND'S WILDLIFE AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES. DEFRA

2.13 This biodiversity strategy for England builds on the Natural Environment White Paper and provides a comprehensive picture of how international and EU commitments will be implemented. It sets out the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade. on land (including rivers and lakes) and at sea. It intends to deliver the outcomes through four action areas:

- a more integrated large-scale approach to
- conservation on land and at sea
- putting people at the heart of biodiversity
- policy

- reducing environmental pressures
- improving knowledge

2.14 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69446/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO VALUING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES – DEFRA

2.15 The aim of this guide is to provide an introduction to the valuation of ecosystem services. It takes a systematic approach to the assessment of the impacts on the natural environment to ensure that the true value of ecosystems and the services provided are taken into account in policy decision making.

2.16 Ecosystem services are defined as services provided by the natural environment that benefit people. Some of these ecosystem services are well known including food, fibre and fuel provision and the cultural services that provide benefits to people through recreation and appreciation of nature. Other services provided by ecosystems are not so well known. These include the regulation of the climate, the purification of air and water, flood protection, soil formation and nutrient cycling. These services are not generally considered within policy appraisal at present and represent an area where a greater and more systematic focus would be very useful.

2.17 This broader framework allows a shift in emphasis from a focus mainly on valuing environmental damage to highlighting the value of changes in the services provided by the natural environment. Ecosystem services contribute to economic welfare in two ways – through contributions to the generation of income and wellbeing and through the prevention of damages that inflict costs on society. Both types of benefits should be accounted for in policy appraisal. With a broader focus on valuing the benefits provided by ecosystems, policy options that enhance the natural environment are also more likely to be considered that demonstrate that investing in natural capital can make economic sense

2.18 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/economics/pdf/valuing_ecosystems.pdf

3. Evidence and Research

NATURAL VALUE - THE STATE OF DORSET'S ENVIRONMENT

3.1 In 2013 the local nature partnership board agreed that one of the first priorities was to take stock of state of Dorset's environment and so it commissioned the Dorset 'Natural Value' report that sought to present locally specific information demonstrating both the environmental value of the area and the economic and social value of the areas environment.

3.2 Key finding in relation to Development planning was that:

Local planning policy includes good intentions on the natural environment and resources but we are yet to see if these can be implemented and enforced effectively. Ensuring that new development contributes to environmental enhancement and does not cause undue harm is a key challenge. Our local protocols for wildlife mitigation and enhancement have made excellent progress towards an efficient but effective planning system.

3.3 http://www.dorsetlnp.org.uk/hres/natural-value-report.pdf

DORSET'S ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMY

3.4 The Dorset Environmental Economy measures the economic value of Dorset's unique environment including the Jurassic Coast world heritage site and Dorset AONB.

3.5 The report concluded that while it is advisable to avoid a single measure of the environmental economy, the central estimate is that it contributes, on a comparable basis with other economic statistics, about £1.5bn of GVA p.a. and supports about 30,000 jobs in Dorset – or 8-10% of total annual economic output and employment.

3.6 The report also looked at how Dorset residents value the environment and the findings were:

- Residents value the natural environment highly, make use of it frequently and regard the quality of the natural environment as one of the main reasons for living in Dorset
- Residents recognise that there is a price to be paid for maintaining the natural environment, and there is a willingness to pay for it directly and indirectly
- Residents probably over-estimate the proportion of local taxation which is devoted to the upkeep of the natural environment
- Residents place a high value on the contribution the environment makes to their wellbeing, and value highly the largely free and open access currently afforded

3.7 https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/environmental-economy

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE GUIDANCE – NATURAL ENGLAND

http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35033

3.8 Natural England defines green infrastructure as;

'a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a

multifunctional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves and needed to underpin sustainability. Its design and management should also respect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of an area with regard to habitats and landscape types.

Green Infrastructure includes established green spaces and new sites and should thread through and surround the built environment and connect the urban area to its wider rural hinterland. Consequently it needs to be delivered at all spatial scales from sub-regional to local neighbourhood levels, accommodating both accessible natural green spaces within local communities and often much larger sites in the urban fringe and wider countryside.'

3.9 The guidance goes on to identify a set of typologies to describe different elements of Green infrastructure.

Parks and Gardens	Urban parks, Country and Regional Parks, formal gardens
Amenity Greenspace	Informal recreation spaces, housing green spaces, domestic gardens, village greens, urban commons, other incidental space, green roofs
Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces	Woodland and scrub, grassland (e.g. downland and meadow), heath or moor, wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and disturbed ground), bare rock habitats (e.g. cliffs and quarries)
Green corridors	Rivers and canals including their banks, road and rail corridors, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, and rights of way
Other	Allotments, community gardens, city farms, cemeteries and churchyards

LANDSCAPE INSTITUTES POSITION STATEMENT ON GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

3.10 The Landscape Institute defines GI as 'the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect villages, towns and cities. It is a natural, service-providing infrastructure that is often more cost-effective, more resilient and more capable of meeting social, environmental and economic objectives than 'grey' infrastructure.

3.11 The institute defines green infrastructure in terms of assets and functions. Assets range from country parks, lakes and woodlands to green roof and street trees whereas functions are the roles that assets play. They have primary functions but each asset can perform

different functions simultaneously. For example street trees add aesthetic quality to urban areas, but will also reduce airborne pollution, provide shade, reduce urban heat island effects, mitigate wind chill and turbulence and increase biodiversity.

4. Neighbouring Areas Approach

SOUTH EAST DORSET GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

4.1 South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy provides a non-statutory framework for green infrastructure across the area which is covered by seven authorities; Bournemouth BC, Christchurch BC, East Dorset DC, Poole BC, and Purbeck DC, which adjoins West Dorset. It sets out a vision which seeks to co-ordinate the planning for, and investment in parks, gardens, open spaces, wildlife corridors, street trees and other green spaces. The aim is to maximise the benefits these spaces can provide in terms of health, accessibility, ecology, recreation, flood management, urban design, and climate change adaptation, and to make the most effective use of limited resources.

NORTH DORSET

4.2 The North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 sets out categories for the different types of site and their primary functions that make up the green infrastructure network. To inform the production of the Local Plan Part 2 the Council will produce a green infrastructure strategy that will enable the coordinated provision of an integrated green infrastructure network across the whole District where individual elements contribute to achieving the wider objectives of the Local Plan.

EAST DEVON

4.3 Green infrastructure evidence gathering is being progressed through work on the preparation of the local plan in those parts of East Devon that are outside the major growth points.

SOUTH SOMERSET

4.4 A green infrastructure strategy will be developed by South Somerset District Council. The adopted South Somerset Local plan 2006 – 2028 contains a policy EQ5: Green Infrastructure, to protect and enhance existing green infrastructure assets. Clear priorities for Green infrastructure will be established through the forthcoming strategy.

5. Current Approach

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK: POLICY ENV3

5.1 Policy ENV3 – Green Infrastructure Network states that the councils will work together with local communities and other relevant partners to develop a green infrastructure strategy for the plan area. For the interim period prior to a green infrastructure strategy being developed, the Local Plan defines green infrastructure as:

- Areas / Land of Local Landscape Importance (as identified in the previously adopted local plans);
- Portland Coastline (as identified in the previously adopted local plan for Weymouth and Portland);
- Important Open Gaps (as identified in the previously adopted local plan for Weymouth and Portland);
- Historically important spaces (as identified in adopted Conservation Area Appraisals);
- Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Local Nature Reserves and Ancient Woodlands, Lorton Valley and Portland Quarries nature parks.

5.2 Regarding development, Policy ENV3 – Green Infrastructure Network states that "Development that would cause harm to the green infrastructure network or undermine the reasons for an area's inclusion within the network will not be permitted unless clearly outweighed by other considerations." Conversely "proposals that promote geodiversity and biodiversity within this network of spaces and provide improved access and recreational use (where appropriate) should be supported."

6. Reason for Change

6.1 The NPPF states that planning should *"take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it"*

6.2 Having a plan-wide framework for West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland will assist in planning positively for green infrastructure giving a greater likelihood of achieving the multiple benefits associated with green infrastructure provision.

6.3 Policy ENV3 is an interim policy pending the intended development of a separate Green Infrastructure Strategy. It affords protection to various environmental designations identified through previous local plans prior to their assessment for potential inclusion within a Green Infrastructure network. The local plan review however provides the opportunity to alter this approach and define a green infrastructure network through this process.

6.4 West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland and North Dorset are the areas in Dorset that are not covered by the SE Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy. Defining a network through both local plan reviews will complete the coverage throughout Dorset.

6.5 It is not possible to define a network until a system for categorising different types of green spaces has been established. Once established, green spaces identified through the previous designations will be reassessed to determine whether they should continue to be included in the GI network. New sites may also be included if they fall into any of the definitions.

7. Issues & Options Consultation

7.1 In order to define the Green Infrastructure network a series of categories need to be established to identify different elements, their function and benefits within the network. Given the multifunctional nature of the network areas may be included in more than one category.

7.2 Some of the areas included within designations may not be publicly accessible due to their environmental sensitivity, particularly if they are included within an international or national designation. These areas are also protected by other policies within the local plan.

7.3 It is proposed to adopt the categories for the types and functions of Green Infrastructure shown in Figure 20.1. This is based on the definitions identified in Natural England guidance on GI with the addition of 'Local Character Areas'. Furthermore it follows those categories used in North Dorset's Local Plan Part 1 which will be used to develop a GI strategy as part of their review. Common categories would allow joint assessment work to be carried out as the strategies are developed for the two local plan areas.

Figure 6.1: Types and functions of green infrastructure

TYPE	EXAMPLES	PRIMARY FUNCTION
Outdoor recreation facilities, parks and gardens	Sports pitches and greens, playgrounds, urban parks, country parks, formal gardens.	Offer opportunities for sports, play and recreation and to enable easy access to the countryside (for example Bridport Leisure Centre, Redlands Sports Hub, Dorchester's Borough Gardens)
Amenity greenspace	Informal recreation spaces, housing green spaces, landscape planting, village greens, urban commons, other incidental space	Creating attractive and pleasant built environments, providing community and private outdoor leisure space (for example 'Green' off Sprague Close, Weymouth)
Natural and semi-natural green / blue spaces	Nature reserves, woodland and scrub, grassland, heathlands, wetlands, ponds, open and running water, landscape planting	Creating areas for biodiversity, geodiversity, access to education associated with the natural environment (for example Radipole Lake, Jellyfields Nature Reserve, Portland Quarries Nature Park)
Green corridors	Rivers including their banks and floodplains, trees & hedgerows, dry stone walls, road and rail corridors, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, rights of way, Coast	Creating corridors for wildlife, including links between wildlife sites and enhancements to semi natural habitats. Creating a sustainable travel network promoting walking and cycling, enhancements to semi

		natural habitats and integrating micro green infrastructure into urban areas (for example Rodwell Trail, English Coastal path, River Brit corridor)
Local character areas	Churchyards, treed areas, roadside verges, landscape screening, setting of a building, open gaps, important views	Creates a sense of character within a settlement contributing to the attractiveness of an area or building. (for example Sherborne Abbey Close, Tree lined Avenues and Green spaces at Coneygar Road, Coneygar Lane and Beaumont Ave in Bridport, Open gap between Preston and Sutton Poyntz)
Other	Allotments, community gardens, orchards, cemeteries and churchyards	Providing accessible facilities to meet needs within settlements, including enabling local food production (for example Poundbury Community Farm, Bridport Community Orchard, St Georges church yard, Portland)

22-i. Do you think the definitions of Green Infrastructure above offer a suitable framework for identifying green infrastructure types?

22-ii. Is there anything missing from the categories?