

Joint Response to Examiner's Question EQ1

Dorset Council (the Local Planning Authority) and the Steering Group of Blandford Forum Town Council (lead Qualifying Body)

Examiner's Question EQ1

Response to Paragraphs 1 to 7

1. We note that you appear concerned that the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2033 January 2019 (NP19) may be a 'repeat proposal' of the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan 2015 – 2031, July 2016 (NP16) as defined by §5 of Schedule 4B of the 1990 Act. For the avoidance of doubt, Dorset Council (DC) and the Qualifying Body (QB) agreed at the outset that NP19 would not be a repeat proposal and both remain firmly of this opinion. Firstly, NP19 was submitted more than two years after the date of the submission of NP16 (as per Condition A of §5(3)). Secondly, DC and the QB has accepted in the submission documentation and elsewhere in this response that the strategic planning framework had significantly changed in the interim (Condition B of §5(5)). In which case, we consider the examination of NP16 as being of no direct relevance to the examination of NP19.
2. For that reason, the submission documentation contains no prolonged analysis of NP16 nor of its examination. However, Section 1 of NP19 does provide a brief summary of NP16 and sets out the approach taken to bringing forward NP19. Importantly, it refers to the report by Urban Vision Enterprise CIC¹ (UVE) and to the Withdrawal Statement², which provides a chronology of the events following the examination of NP16 and of the subsequent involvement of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). In addition, the Examination Report of NP16, the UVE Report and the Withdrawal Statement are addressed in the Consultation Statement and are included at [Appendices 2, 4 and 5](#) respectively.
3. Given this history, we consider it vital that NP19 is examined afresh. As this is a complex matter we suggest an exploratory meeting is arranged with you so that such concerns may be allayed.

Response to Paragraph 8

"At this stage I have no understanding of NDDC's (and now Dorset Council's) weighing of the issue around the allocations in Policies B2 and B3(c) and how it answers the apparent conflict with Policy 16: 'Blandford' of the North Dorset District Council (NDDC) Local Plan Part 1, and why it was "agreed with NDDC in May 2018 to increase the scope of the B+NP to take forward the work from NDDC's Local Plan 'Issues and options' Consultation ahead of the Local Plan Review".

¹ Blandford + NP: Options for Moving Forward (Nov 2017)

² Blandford + NP: (2015–2031) Withdrawal Statement (May 2018)

Whilst a NP can take account of evidence emerging in the preparation of a new LP, how can it be right that a NP actually takes on the mantle of the LPA – if that is what is meant?”

4. In response to the point regarding how DC answers the apparent conflict of Policy B2 (Land North & East of Blandford Forum) and Policy B3 (c) (Employment – Land adjacent to Sunrise Business Park) in NP19 with Policy 16 (Blandford) of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1) it is noted that Policy 16 outlines, in terms of a 'Sustainable Development Strategy', that Blandford *'will maintain its role as the main service centre in the south of the district through:*
 - a. development and redevelopment within the settlement boundary; and*
 - b. extensions, primarily of housing to the south-east and to the west of Blandford St Mary; and*
 - c. employment uses on land within the bypass on the northern edge of the town and the mixed-use regeneration of the Brewery site close to the town centre.'*
5. Further elements of Policy 16, titled 'Meeting Housing Needs' and 'Supporting Economic Development', provide additional detail regarding how housing needs and employment needs will be met at Blandford up to 2031.
6. DC acknowledges, as was argued by North Dorset District Council (NDDC) in relation to Policy 1 (Land North & East of Blandford Forum) in NP16, that there is a degree of conflict between what is set out in Policy 16 of LPP1 and Policy B2 and part (c) of Policy B3 in NP19. However, DC considers that Policy 16 in LPP1 should not be viewed in isolation when considering whether policies B2 and B3 (c) in the NP19 are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area as a whole. Additionally, it should be noted that part (v) of Policy 16 identifies that in the period up to 2031, social infrastructure to support growth will include the extension of the Archbishop Wake school and either extension of the Milldown school or provision of a new 2 forms of entry primary school [our emphasis].
7. As identified in Policy 16, Blandford fulfils a role of being the main service centre in the south of the former North Dorset district area. Policy 2 (Core Spatial Strategy) in the LPP1 details the spatial strategy for North Dorset and outlines that Blandford (Forum and St. Mary) is one of the four main towns in North Dorset that will function as a main service centre and will be the main focus for growth, both for the vast majority of housing and other development. Consequently, DC considers that the proposals set out in policies B2 and B3 (c) in NP19 are in accordance with the spatial strategy for North Dorset outlined in LPP1.
8. Also, in addition to Policy 2 in LPP1, DC considers it important that Policy B2 in NP19 is considered against Policy 6 (Housing Distribution) in LPP1. Policy 6 details that *'At least 5,700 additional home will be*

provided in North Dorset between 2011 and 2031 to deliver an average annual rate of about 285 dwellings per annum. The vast majority of housing growth will be concentrated at the District's four main towns of Blandford (Forum and St.Mary), Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton.' The policy goes on to outline that the approximate scale of housing development at Blandford (Forum and St.Mary), during the period 2011-2031, will be at least [our emphasis] 1,200 homes. Given that the housing figures in LPP1 are expressed as 'at least' figures, and, therefore, not a cap on development, DC considers that Policy 2 in NP19, which allows for approximately 400 dwellings, is in general conformity with Policy 6 in LPP1.

9. Further to the policies themselves paragraphs 8.12 and 8.13 of LPP1, which form part of the supporting text to Policy 16, make reference to the future strategy for Blandford. These are in addition to paragraph 8.24, referred to by the Examiner, which also makes reference to the future strategy for the town.
10. Paragraph 8.12 outlines, amongst other things, that the strategy for the town will see the building out of sites already allocated for development or with planning permission in the early part of the plan period, with additional greenfield sites beyond the bypass being brought forward after that date. Paragraph 8.13 states that *'Blandford Forum Town Council together with Blandford St Mary and Bryanston Parish Councils have established a single neighbourhood area to cover all three parish areas. The three local councils are working together, under the name Blandford +, to produce a single neighbourhood plan. This will deal with non-strategic matters to supplement the policies contained in the Local Plan, which can include additional greenfield sites beyond the bypass.'*
11. It is of note that paragraph 8.12 of LPP1 allows for additional greenfield sites, beyond the bypass, to be brought forward within the plan period covered by LPP1 (up to 2031). Furthermore, it is of significance that paragraph 8.13 of LPP1 allows NP19 to supplement policies contained in LPP1 and the fact that this could include allocating additional greenfield sites beyond the bypass (our emphasis). This statement was a key modification signalled in the LPP1 [Inspector's Report](#) (Non-Technical Summary and paragraphs 80 and 84) and [Main Modification 14](#).
12. It is acknowledged that paragraph 8.13 also outlines that the neighbourhood plan will deal with non-strategic matters to supplement the policies contained in LPP1. However, whilst the proposals contained in policies B2 and B3 (c) could possibly be considered to be strategic matters, there are strong arguments including evidence of increased housing and employment needs; the critical need for new education infrastructure; DC being unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply for the North Dorset area; and the limited progress in respect of the North Dorset Local Plan Review that supports the principle of NP19 allocating the sites set out in the plan, a principle which accords with NPPF §23 as described in paragraph 2.3 of the

Basic Conditions Statement.

13. Since the LPP1 was adopted by NDDC more up to date evidence of housing needs has been published in relation to North Dorset. This evidence sets out higher housing needs figures than those which formed the basis of the housing requirement figures in the LPP1. The higher housing needs figures, including the figure of 330 dwellings per annum for North Dorset, are set out in the Eastern Dorset 2015 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Applying the Government's standard methodology in relation to assessing housing need generates an even higher annual housing need figure in North Dorset. The current annual housing need figure, based on the Government's standard methodology, is 355 dwellings per annum which is approximately 20% higher than the requirement figure of 285 dwellings per annum in the LPP1.
14. Given DC is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply for the North Dorset area, part (d) of paragraph 11 (The presumption in favour of sustainable development) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019) is applicable when determining planning applications in the neighbourhood plan area. The allocation of the land subject to Policy B2 has the potential to help improve the five-year housing land supply figure in respect of North Dorset.
15. NDDC first confirmed that it didn't have a five-year housing land supply in July 2017 (soon after receipt of the Examiner's Report on version 1 of the neighbourhood plan) and it continues to be the case that there isn't a five year housing land supply for the North Dorset area. The current housing land supply for the North Dorset area being 3.3 years. Early analysis of housing monitoring data for the 2018/19 monitoring period indicates that the lack of a five year housing land supply is likely to persist in North Dorset for the foreseeable future.
16. In addition to DC being unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply in North Dorset, it is of note that paragraph 1.10 of LPP1 includes, amongst other things, the following text regarding the need to review the plan; '*...to ensure the plan remains relevant in the face of rapidly changing circumstances, the Council will commence a review of the Plan by the end of March 2016 and intends to adopt the Plan by the end of November 2018. The early review of the Plan will ensure that it remains appropriate for the District and continues to encourage and secure the development and infrastructure that the District requires. ...*'. The need for the early review primarily being the requirement to take account of evidence of higher housing needs figures than those which formed the basis of the housing requirement figures in LPP1.
17. For a number of different reasons NDDC was unable to progress the Local Plan Review as quickly as intended. Consequently, it did not adopt the plan by the end of November 2018 and the review is still at an early stage. Furthermore, as a result of local government reorganisation in Dorset, which resulted in NDDC being dissolved and

the formation of Dorset Council, officers are due to recommend to members that work on the North Dorset Local Plan Review ceases. The work that has been done to date on the review will be used, where possible, to help shape the new Dorset Council Local Plan that will cover the whole of the administrative area of Dorset Council. For further details please see the report titled 'Dorset Council Local Plan and Local Development Scheme' (available via the following [link](#) from the 17 June 2019 and which is due to be considered by members of Dorset Council's Cabinet on the 25 June 2019.

18. As outlined in the proposed Local Development Scheme (LDS), which will be appended to the report referred to above, it is currently intended that Dorset Council will adopt the Dorset Council Local Plan in 2023. Consequently, it will be sometime before a new set of planning policies covering the neighbourhood plan area are produced and adopted by Dorset Council.
19. The fact that NDDC didn't adopt its Local Plan Review by the end of November 2018 and the fact that there isn't currently a five-year housing land supply in respect of North Dorset leaves the neighbourhood plan area vulnerable to speculative planning applications. Furthermore, given the potential that there may not be a five-year housing land supply for the foreseeable future means that this vulnerability could be sustained for a long period of time. This would be contrary to the Government's aim, as set out in paragraph 15 of the NPPF, of having a genuinely plan-led system. Whilst only time limited the making of the neighbourhood plan, including Policy B2 could, subject to criteria in paragraph 14 of the NPPF being met, provide the neighbourhood plan area with some additional protection against speculative planning applications for development that is not in accordance with the adopted development plan for the area.
20. The shared strategy of DC and the QB was a pragmatic response to the circumstances outlined above and is considered to accord with the provisions of the NPPF which require Neighbourhood Plans to be prepared to support the strategic development needs of the area (paragraphs 13 and 23). In addition, the principle of a Neighbourhood Plan being brought forward before an up-to-date Local Plan is in place is established in Planning Practice Guidance (ID: 41-009-20190509). It requires the qualifying body and the local planning authority to discuss and agree the relationship between the policies in the emerging neighbourhood plan, the emerging Local Plan and the adopted development plan with appropriate regard to national policy and guidance. It states:

"The local planning authority should take a proactive and positive approach, working collaboratively with a qualifying body particularly sharing evidence and seeking to resolve any issues to ensure the draft neighbourhood plan has the greatest chance of success at independent examination."

21. Turning now to the matter of why it was agreed with NDDC to increase the scope of the B+NP to take forward the work from NDDC's 'Local Plan Review Issues and Options' consultation ahead of the Local Plan Review, discussions took place between NDDC and the Qualifying Body (Blandford Forum Town Council) (QB) regarding the scope of version 2 of the plan following the withdrawal of version 1 of the plan. The QB expressed its desire to take a lead on allocating sites for development taking into account what was set out in the 'Local Plan Review Issues and Options Consultation Document' produced by NDDC. This included NDDC's conclusions in relation to the development potential of areas of search identified surrounding Blandford. The '[Preliminary Development Options Report](#)' (July, 2018) which was submitted with NP19 and provides information regarding the development specification for the B+NP agreed between the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and NDDC.
22. The [Sustainability Appraisal Report](#) and [Site Selection Background Paper](#) (SSBP) submitted with the plan go into further detail on the consideration of spatial options ('reasonable alternatives') and the contribution of each option to sustainable development.
23. NDDC supported NP19 allocating sites for residential development given, amongst other things, the evidence of increased housing need since the LPP1 was adopted meant that there was a need to allocate additional land for housing as part of the forward planning process. Further information relating to housing provision in respect of NP19, including NDDC's rationale for agreeing the housing requirement figure can be found in the document titled '[Housing Provision relating to the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2033](#)' (January, 2019) submitted with the plan.
24. It is considered that the rationale behind the housing figure agreed between the QB and NDDC accords with the approach that is now set out in paragraph 66 of the revised NPPF. It should be noted that the proposed plan period for the NP, which is up to 2033 and, therefore, extends beyond the plan period (2011-2031) covered by the LPP1, had an influence on the housing figure agreed. The proposed plan end date of 2033 was chosen to coincide with the end date of the plan period that was due to be covered by the North Dorset Local Plan Review as set out in the '[North Dorset Local Plan Review Issues and Options Document](#)' submitted with the plan.
25. In addition to the matter of residential development, NDDC supported the NP allocating land for employment development and a new primary school given that it had been identified that there was a specific need for these types of development at Blandford.
26. In terms of the provision of additional employment land, the latest [monitoring data](#) relating to employment land supply at Blandford at the time work on NP19 was commencing (which post-dated the adoption of LPP1) identified that there was a limited amount (3.46 hectares) of employment land available at Blandford. Furthermore, this

land consisted of a number of small pieces of land rather than a single site which restricted its attractiveness to potential future occupiers. Both of these factors, along with other factors including views expressed by NDDC's Economic Development Team and the responses to the 'Local Plan Review Issues and Options' consultation, identified the need to allocate additional land for employment purposes as part of the forward planning process.

27. With regards to the issue of a new primary school, as previously referred to part (v) of Policy 16 in the LPP1 identifies the potential that a new 2 forms of entry primary school will have to be built at Blandford by 2031. ['The Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning Statement' \(January 2019\)](#) submitted with the plan and produced by Dorset County Council (DCC) (the Local Education Authority (LEA) at the time the plan was submitted³ provided up to date evidence of the need for the school⁴. The statement has been updated in response to the Examiner's question EQ1 (paragraph 9) and this matter is considered in more detail below.
28. In reaching its decision to support NP19 allocating sites for development NDDC considered the report titled ['Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Options for Moving Forward'](#) (November, 2017) submitted with the plan by Urban Vision Enterprise CIC. Section 3.2 of the report considers the principle of whether neighbourhood plans can allocate sites. Reference is made to the fact that the ability of neighbourhood plans to make site allocations was established by the Court of Appeal in R (Larkfleet Homes Ltd) v. Rutland County Council [2015] EWCA Civ 597. In addition, the point is made that some neighbourhood plans do make significant site allocations. A matter which is considered in more detail below.
29. Further to the above, in reaching its decision that the scope of NP19 could include taking forward the work from NDDC's 'Issues and Options' consultation ahead of the Local Plan Review, NDDC considered the content of the NPPF (2012) and the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It noted that national guidance allowed neighbourhood plans to identify sites in excess of what is set out in a Local Plan.
30. The revised NPPF, against which the neighbourhood plan is being examined, sets out that neighbourhood plans can allocate sites for development. Whilst DC acknowledges that it could be considered that paragraph 69 of the NPPF appears to imply that neighbourhood plans should only allocate small and medium-sized sites (no larger than 1 hectare) for development it considers that this paragraph of the NPPF does not preclude neighbourhood plans allocating sites larger than 1 hectare for residential development or other forms of development. In addition, the Land Availability Assessment in the appendix to the Site

³ Dorset Council is now the LEA for the area covered by the neighbourhood plan.

⁴ A further update to the 'The Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning Statement' (June, 2019) has been produced and is appended to this document.

Selection Background Paper has given consideration to the availability of smaller 'brownfield' sites.

31. There are numerous examples of 'made' plans that have allocated large sites for development. For example, the [Newport Pagnell Neighbourhood Plan](#) allocates sites for housing development with an estimated capacity of 1400 homes; the [Tangmere Neighbourhood Plan](#) allocates land for 1000 homes and associated infrastructure; and the [Farnham Neighbourhood Plan](#) allocates sites for nearly 800 homes.
32. Additionally, restricting the size of allocations in neighbourhood plans would be at odds with the Government's aim that neighbourhood plans should be a vehicle for bringing forward development and, as set out in paragraph 29 of the NPPF, neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than that set out in the strategic policies for the area. With regards to the specific matter of residential development, restricting the size of allocations that can be made for residential development would appear to be contrary to the presumption in favour of sustainable development (NPPF paragraph 11 and 16) and the Government's key planning policy objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes set out in paragraph 59 of the NPPF.
33. In respect of development for education purposes, restricting the size of sites that can be allocated would appear to be at odds with paragraph 94 of the NPPF which states; *'It is important that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities. Local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement, and to development that will widen choice in education. They should:*
 - a) *give great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications;*
 - and*
 - b) *work with school promoters, delivery partners and statutory bodies to identify and resolve key planning issues before applications are submitted.'*
34. Also, restricting the size of sites that can be allocated for employment development in a neighbourhood plan would be contrary to paragraph 80 of the NPPF. Paragraph 80 of the revised NPPF states that *'Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. ...'*
35. Finally, on the issue of the increased scope of NP19, it was considered by the Qualifying Body and NDDC, as has turned out to be the case, that it would be possible to progress the neighbourhood plan quicker than the Local Plan Review. Given that NDDC had declared in July 2017 that it no longer had a five-year supply it was considered

important to progress NP19 as quickly as possible to try and offer a greater level of policy protection against current and possible future speculative planning applications in the B+NP area.

36. Turning to the question of 'How can it be right that a NP takes on the mantle of the LPA?'
37. Dorset Council would argue that what is proposed in policies B2 and B3 (c) of NP19 does not constitute the B+NP taking on the mantle of the LPA. As previously referred to, paragraph 8.13 of LPP1 specifically allows for the B+NP to allocate additional greenfield sites beyond the bypass and the process of producing NP19, including decisions relating to the allocation of sites, has involved close collaboration between the QB and the LPA.
38. Further to the above, and as already referred to, given the current wider planning policy context relating to North Dorset, including evidence of higher housing need, the fact that North Dorset does not currently have a five-year housing land supply and is unlikely to have one in the foreseeable future, and the critical need for new education infrastructure, and the fact that the North Dorset Local Plan Review has not been progressed as quickly as intended and is still at an early stage there are strong pragmatic reasons why the neighbourhood plan should be able to allocate the sites set out in policies B2 and B3 (c) of NP19 which the LPA and QB consider reflect the flexibility set out in NPPF paragraph 23. Failure to do so would leave a QB and community that has sought to plan appropriately for its area at increased risk of speculative development. It is considered that this would be contrary to the Government's aim of having a genuinely plan-led planning system as set out in paragraph 15 of the NPPF.

Response to Paragraph 9

"Nor do I understand how the educational requirement justifies the mixed use allocation and employment allocation in such a sensitive location, for much the same reasons as those expressed by Deborah McCann."

39. The UVECIC [Site Allocations in the AONBs](#) Report (dated September 2018), the [Site Selection Background Paper](#), the [Pupil Place Planning Statement](#) and the [Basic Conditions Statement](#) which were submitted with the Plan, explain the exceptional circumstances which has led to NP19 allocating land for a new school within the Cranborne Chase AONB, in order to contribute towards sustainable development. The statement by the Local Education Authority confirms that having considered all alternative options, there are no other sites available within the by-pass to meet their 'critical' needs (the land in question having previously been identified for sports provision).
40. The employment allocation, also within the AONB, lies immediately adjacent to Sunrise Business Park and land allocated for the new Blandford Waste Management Centre in Bournemouth, Dorset and

Poole Waste, which is due to be adopted by DC on 25 June 2019. The Waste Management Centre is allocated within the AONB for similar reasons, in that there were no other suitable sites available within the by-pass.

41. Section 2.3 of the UVECIC AONB Report considered the implications of growth in general terms and in the context of NPPF paragraph 172 given the landscape constraints that exist at Blandford. NDDC and the B+NP Steering Group considered a 'no growth' option ([AECOM SA/SEA Report Final](#) paragraph 4.20) with the purpose of avoiding allocating land in one or other AONB. The SA/SEA however concluded that such an option would "suppress the sustainable growth of Blandford" which could not be considered a 'reasonable alternative'.
42. Regarding the application of paragraph 172 of the NPPF, Section 3 of the UVECIC AONB Report similarly concluded that having considered all other options and given the great weight applied to the protection of designated landscapes (NPPF para 172), a 'no growth or limited growth' scenario would cause considerable social, economic and environmental harm' and must be a factor in the interpretation of the presumption in favour of sustainable development (NPPF paragraph 11 and Footnote 6). The application of NPPF paragraph 172 and the necessity of exercising planning judgement was uppermost in the minds of both NDDC and the B+NP Steering Group as was the responsibility which falls to the Town and Parish Councils in relation to Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 1990.
43. The [Site Selection Background Paper](#) (SSBP) considers these matters in great detail. Including how the choice of options were considered in tandem with the assessment undertaken in the SA/SEA Report and alongside an assessment of the tests set out in NPPF paragraph 172. It was concluded that on balance there were exceptional circumstances justifying the allocations contained in Policies B2 and B3 and that the proposals would be in the public interest (SSBP Sections 6 and 7).

Response to Paragraph 10

"I would like to be told how the local planning authority came to support these policies in the light of the previous Examiner's report, and have answers regarding the need for the new school, how it would be funded, the basis for the obligation required as part of the policy when the 'urgent need' already exists, and any "convincing evidence that there is any certainty that the school will be delivered on this site" (first full paragraph on page 26 of the previous Examination)."

44. With regards to how NDDC, and now Dorset Council, came to support policies B2 and B3 (c) in the B+NP, as referred to above, the revised NPPF allows neighbourhood plans to allocate sites for development. Additionally, as detailed in the ['Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Options for Moving Forward'](#) (November, 2017) report, submitted with the plan, and evidenced by the other neighbourhood plans (Newport

Pagnell, Tangmere and Farnham) referred to above, neighbourhood plans can, and do, allocate large sites for development.

45. Furthermore, as detailed above Dorset Council considers that circumstances have changed significantly since the examination of version 1 of the B+NP and the change in circumstances supports the principle of the B+NP allocating the sites set out in policies B2 and B3 (c). In summary the significant change in circumstances are as follows:
- a) Evidence of increased housing need since the examination of the LPP1. This evidence is set out in the Eastern Dorset 2015 SHMA and is also demonstrated by applying the Government's standard methodology in relation to assessing housing need.
 - b) There is no longer a five-year housing land supply in respect of the North Dorset area with the current housing land supply being only 3.3 years. Initial analysis of the housing monitoring data for the 2018/19 monitoring period indicates that the lack of a five-year housing land supply is likely to persist in North Dorset for the foreseeable future.
 - c) The North Dorset Local Plan Review has not progressed as quickly as anticipated and is still at an early stage. Furthermore, as a result of local government reorganisation in Dorset, officers are due to recommend to members that work on the North Dorset Local Plan Review ceases. It is proposed that the work that has been done to date on the review will feed into the new Dorset Council Local Plan. The proposed Dorset Council LDS details that the Council will adopt the Dorset Council Local Plan in 2023.
46. In addition to the points raised above DC considers that the need for the new primary school is more time-critical than when NP16 was subject to examination. The most up to date position regarding school provision at Blandford, including the need for a new primary school, is set out in the 'Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning Statement' (updated June 2019), appended to this document.
47. Finally, in respect of NP16, it is of note that NDDC raised significant concerns, which the examiner agreed with, regarding the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the plan, including its consideration of reasonable alternatives and cumulative impacts, and the evidence base to support the proposed allocations in the plan. Dorset Council is satisfied that the concerns previously raised in relation to the SA and the evidence base have been addressed in NP19.
48. Turning to the question of the basis for the (education) obligation required as part of the policy when the 'urgent need' already exists, and any "convincing evidence that there is any certainty that the school will be delivered on this site", the Pupil Place Planning Statement (PPPS) sets out the range of options the LEA have considered to meet their statutory responsibilities and confirms there are no other sites available other than the site allocated by NP19 Policy

B2. The Statement also outlines the mechanism for funding and delivery which updates the previous information submitted with the Plan.

49. The PPPS confirms that about £2.4m of S106 contributions form part of a signed agreement to fund the school. This equates to about a third of the cost of the new school outlined in the [NDDC Infrastructure Delivery Plan](#) (page 35) The PPPS also outlines the mechanism by which the balance of funding is secured and the mechanism and timetable by which DC prepare the 'business case'; confirming the approach follows DfE guidance.

Response to Paragraph 11

"I hope that the above paragraphs explain my concerns clearly and that it will be possible for a full explanation of why essentially the same Plan has been resubmitted. In responding, please bear in mind the following paragraphs of the Framework (February 2019): 8 and footnote 6; 66 and footnote 31; 56 and footnote 24 (re Reg 122(2) of the CIL Regs); 68; 69; 127 c); and 172. Of course, there may be other elements of the Framework to which you wish to draw attention."

50. As discussed above, DC and the QB do not consider this is a repeat proposal. They maintain that the evidence documents submitted with NP19 plan provide a full response to the questions outlined in your letter.

51. In response to paragraph 11, DC and the QB consider that NP19 meets its obligations under NPPF paragraphs, 8, 11 and 13 having had regard to Footnote 6, paragraphs 127c and 172 and have balanced the weight afforded to the need to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty with the weight the NPPF applies to paragraphs 59, 80 and 94 and of the NPPF as a whole.

Response to Paragraph 12

"In light of the above matters I am considering the need for a hearing. Please could some thought be given to when this might be arranged, so that, if I do so decide, we can make the necessary arrangements without undue delay."

52. As stated previously, DC and the QB consider it vital that NP19 is examined afresh. However, as this is a complex matter we suggest an exploratory meeting is arranged with you at your earliest convenience and prior to a formal hearing so that such concerns as you outline in your letter may be allayed.

Appendix A

Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning Statement

October 2019 (Updated June 2019)

Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning Statement

October 2018 (Updated June 2019)

The Blandford Town is divided into two catchments. One combined catchment that services Milldown and Archbishop Wake, and the other being Blandford St. Mary.

The two town schools, Milldown (30/ 1FE) and Archbishop Wake (60/ 2FE), have been subject to both an absolute increase in numbers as well as a modest increase in the 4+ transfer rate into mainstream schools. In September 2015 Dorset County Council (DCC) provided an additional 15 places at Milldown Primary, raising their PAN temporarily from 30 to 45. This has been repeated for September 2016. DCC is very concerned that if no new site is brought forward for a new school that the Local Authority's (LA) statutory duty to provide sufficient school places could be at risk as the Milldown School could not absorb further temporary buildings to take in the existing numbers of children in the pyramid.

The Blandford Town Pupil Place Planning area has been subject to a significant increase in numbers of children at the 4+ point of entry. In 2010 this was 112 children looking for a reception place against a then capacity of 75. As this number increased an additional 15 places were made available at Archbishop Wake Primary taking them from 45 to 60 places.

For the 2014 entry point the number of children looking for a reception place rose to 147 then 133 in 2015 and 148 in 2016, and then 153 in 2017. It is anticipated that 146 children will be looking for places for September 2019, with a constant projection without new housing being factored in of 147-149 every year going forward.

As stated above, Dorset Council (formerly Dorset County Council) (DC/DCC) has been managing the additional pressures through the temporary expansion of Milldown Primary. There is a limit for this unplanned expansion of the school using modular temporary buildings and this is not a mechanism for providing sustained high-quality places. The design of Archbishop Wake Primary makes it impossible to build additional accommodation within the area of the school buildings and has been ruled out for extension on the playing fields as they are remote from the school and this presents significant safeguarding issues if a school is expanded in this way.

DC thus currently has existing demand of 30+ places per year in excess of what can be managed. The projections, without taking into account further housing, suggest a 140-150 4+ catchment children per year through to 2026. Traditionally there has been 91%+ transition/take up rate.

As well as the additional 15+ places that are required now, there is a need for an additional 1FE entry to accommodate the proposed housing identified within the adopted North Dorset District Local Plan Part 1 2011-2031 (NDLP1).

As stated there are considerable difficulties that at present could not be overcome to increase the town capacity by 1FE. To add an additional further 1FE of capacity can only be accommodated by a new school.

The Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan (B+NP2) has been prepared to plan for housing growth in the B+ neighbourhood area and as part of a shared strategy with NDDC (now DC) it was agreed to plan for a minimum of 400 homes. The Western Dorset Economic Growth Strategy for: North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland 2017 to 2033 predicts a total growth for Blandford of 660 Houses and therefore any residual homes that need to be accommodated after growth accommodated in the B+NP version 2, will be accommodated through the Local Plan Review, this is , subject to Dorset Council's Cabinet's agreement, due to be absorbed into the Dorset Council Local Plan which currently has a target date for adoption of March 2023. Pimperne Neighbourhood Plan has recently passed its examination and includes growth of 40-45 houses.

Based on these revised housing factors to be adopted, using 660 new houses for the purposes of calculations, this would generate 161 additional children (23 per year group at primary). This in itself would require a new 1FE of capacity in addition to the 1FE already identified to accommodate the growth already committed in NDLP1.

Given that an additional 2FE of capacity is required in the Town to absorb existing demographic pressures and to respond to the housing in the plan, the most efficient, appropriate and sustainable way is to build a new school. If additional housing comes forward as part of the B+NP version 2, this will further entrench the need for the 2FE of additional capacity.

The options for a school site have been investigated:

1. To expand existing – as previously documented above, 2FE could not be added to the existing school estate on their current sites.
2. A new school on the Blandford St. Mary Development or in the area identified as Area F – The children from this development will be absorbed by the Blandford St. Mary Primary, and push back children that access the school from the town. The places that are required are to the north of the town where the pressures are and where a significant component of the new housing will be allocated. Indeed the B+NP version 2 proposals further consolidate the position for a need for provision in the north. To secure a 2FE site to the south of Blandford St. Mary will require in excess of 280+ children travelling to and from Blandford Town into Blandford St. Mary each day.
3. The retail/commercial land south of Sunrise Business Park – This has now been confirmed as retail/commercial for a supermarket development and is no longer an option.
4. The sports provision site north of the Blandford By-pass – this site can provide the necessary minimum 2.1ha that are required for 2FE. It can also provide sufficient site for a 3FE should DCC want to secure some additional school provision for developments beyond the end of the current local plan. The site is to the North of Blandford and thus is sited close to where the children are currently coming from. There are already good pedestrian links into the housing provision in the northern part of the town.
5. Other sites – DC/DCC has looked and it has been agreed locally that there are no other sites of appropriate size within the town/by-pass area.

To this end DC is committed to securing a minimum 2FE school site in Blandford and based on the analysis to date, the site north of the bypass is the most appropriate, and the delivery of which is critical to the ability of DCC to fulfil its statutory obligation of providing school places in the town.

Comparison of the various models of delivery:

There are further proposals have been suggested to the south of Blandford.

Proposal/Model 1 – 400 new units and the School in area F (B+NP2 Spatial Options):

If a new 2FE provision of school places (60 per year Group) is generated in area F and that in addition to the existing allocations a further 400 houses are placed in Area F, then based on residual places in the north, and any residual amount from the Local Plan Review, approximately a further 260 units in the Pimperne parish then materialise – up to 40 children and young people per year group will be travelling from the northern residential areas to access primary education in the south.

Proposal/Model 2 – 400 new houses in the South and the school site in the North:

If the new school is developed in the north (yellow bridge site – Area A) but the same housing distribution as per Option 1 comes forward, then 12 children from the southern housing developments will have to travel north to access their primary education.

Proposal/Model 3 – 400 houses and a new school developed in the North:

Based on the same overall quantum of houses, but the 400 B+NP2 houses are developed in the north along with the school, then all the children in the southern housing developments and existing housing will be able to access the Blandford St Mary Primary School. All children in the Northern developments will be accommodated in the 3 northern schools totalling 150 place capacity.

Thus it is more efficient and appropriate to deliver the new school to the North, in area A of the B+ Spatial Options, which will provide places for the existing additional children that are to be generated by ongoing developments in the current NDLP1, as well as proposals for 400 houses in the B+NP2 in the north, and any residual amount from the Local Plan Review. Given the need for the new school to accommodate this additional capacity from the North, it is appropriate that it is placed in the North to remove the need for any child to travel from the south to the north or vice versa.

Given the likely constraints on further school site allocations, DCC has looked for a minimum 2.1ha site for a 2FE site but have also, with the developers, considered the ability of the area to provide a 3FE site (minimum 3ha). There is likely to be continued pressure from out of catchment for places at Pimperne, but this will be based on parental preference.

DCC acknowledges our preferred site sits within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) but:

- a) The pressure of school places and the statutory duty of the LA to provide sufficient school places, makes the proposal an exceptional one and in the public interest given the lack of alternative sites within the town. Delivery of a new primary school in Blandford remains critical as existing population levels are showing an upward trend and new housing developments continue to be approved;
- b) There would be works to address any appropriate landscaping to minimise the impact of the development;
- c) There are no appropriate sites for a 2.1ha school other than the preferred site. To have the school developed elsewhere away from the AONB (if a site was identified) will have significant impact on the school's ability to address the needs of the community locally where the need exists in the northern part of the town. In addition it would significantly increase the environmental impact on the area by the additional car movements required to ensure 150-300 children could access the primary school safely;
- d) Site F in terms of topography is limited for development in F2 and is thus significantly less suitable than the proposed school sites in Area A. Area F1 is in the Dorset AONB;
- e) The potential traffic movements as a result of a school and housing in area F will increase significantly. The Secondary School students from the area (280) will have to travel out of the south to access the secondary. This could be added to by up to 280 children moving south to access primary education in the south in Model 1;
- f) There are significant concerns in Model 1 & 2 that the localised road network in Blandford St. Mary cannot contain this level of traffic for school movements alone.

Early Years and Secondary Provision

New developer matrices suggest that this level of development (400 houses from the B+ neighbourhood plan and the residual amount, approximately a further 260, being dealt with through the Local Plan Review) would require 55 nursery places, and these would be supplied through the new school having a dedicated integrated Early Years Provision.

Secondary demand would rise by 18 pupils per year in the Year 7-11 cohort with an additional thirty-six 6th form places being required. These would be provided through expansion of The Blandford School, though developer contributions would be required to resource this level of expansion at the school.

Funding of the new school:

The existing housing allocations will contribute based on the prevailing per pupil place costs that are in place at the time – this is currently £6,094 per place for the area.

DCC is looking to revise this so that local developments, as well as contributing marginally more for primary and secondary, will also provide for nursery and Special Education Need.

Once the need is established, then the LA will be required to deliver the places and thus through the use of, probably by way of a combination, S106, Local Authority capital allocations and DFE basic need allocations the relevant budget will be allocated to the relevant project.

There are already some £2.4m of confirmed S106 contributions through a signed agreement and a further £1.16m S106 contributions for projects that are under negotiation with a live planning application.

If the school is to be delivered through the Department of Education Wave Programme, then some of the existing S106's contributions would be surrendered to the DFE, and they would then fund the balance of the project.

If Dorset Council were to deliver the school, these funds would be used, along with those secured against the planning application for the North East Blandford development to fund the school. Once the project costs are fully detailed and agreed by DC (see below) the balance of the funding would be released by the Council.

Timelines for securing funding and delivery of a new school

DC would look to deliver a school for the start of an Academic Year – The first day of term in September being 'Dday'.

Based on this and assuming no abnormalities of the delivery and in-line with RIBA gateways, a generic timeline may look like the following:

Action	Weeks
Concept Design / Options Appraisal	12
Obtain Client Approval to Proceed to Feasibility	1
Feasibility	14
Commit to Design (funding Envelope Agreed)	1
Design development including Planning Permission & Tendering	46
Commit to construct (Cabinet Approval) – Final approval to finance the project	1
Construction	52
Building handed over to School/Academy for preparation of occupation (end of academic Year in previous July)	4
Opening of New School (September)	Dday

This is a total of 131 weeks to deliver a project from a standing start with the identification of the order of cost after 28 weeks with formal approval to proceed to construct and commitment of funding from the Local Authority after 75 weeks of this process. This is a generic timeline and subject to individual project variations.

Based on the current existing and proposed permissions, the developments to the South of Blandford Str Mary will potentially add pressure to the school system very soon after their first completions, and dependent on build out rate, will continue to add pressure year on year.

This Pupil Place Planning Statement has been developed within the guidelines set out by the National Planning Policy Framework (February 2019), The National Planning Practice Guidance (May 2019) and the DFE Guidance – Securing Developer Contributions for Education (April 2019).

Dorset Council's approach and engagement with this new submission is guided by these documents - specifically the NPPF with regards to Developer contributions and the NPPG with regards to viability and planning obligations.

It is also important to note the recent (April 2019) Guidance from the DFE on securing developer contributions, superficially around funding that is provided through the Department of Education and the requirement to provide long term strategies to ensure sufficient high-quality places in a timely manner and securing sufficiently large sites to meet the needs of the development(s).

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793661/Securing_developer_contributions_for_education.pdf

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