

Symondsbury Parish Council

Draft Comments for the Local Plan consultation.

Introduction: Symondsbury Parish Council (SPC) has reviewed the current Local Plan proposals, spoken with key businesses and organisations affecting services and infrastructure within the Parish and will listen to its residents through public consultation for the Parish itself and its key neighbour Bridport Town Council.

Symondsbury Parish Council (SPC) and Bridport Town Council are jointly currently updating the made Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan which will shortly be going through its own consultation process and as such the content is agreed going forward. This includes the Site Options Assessment for the BANP review for which AECOM were commissioned to undertake an independent site appraisal for the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP). The work undertaken was agreed with Bridport and Symondsbury Parish Councils (PC) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2025 as part of the national Neighbourhood Planning Technical Support programme led by Locality and is offered as is offered as evidence for the Dorset Local Plan.

The majority of the opportunity sites in Symondsbury are on greenfield sites, are in the National Landscape with some affecting the world Heritage coastal area. SPC suggests that there should be greater emphasis on the use of brownfield sites within the local settlement areas and maximizing the reuse of existing empty or underused buildings thus protecting the effect on greenfield areas. It is understood that throughout Western Dorset there is a substantial amount of underused or empty buildings that could be utilized, some of which are owned by Dorset Council. As such SPC agrees with Bridport Town Council that there should be densification of development on brownfields sites and grey sites.

There is a pressing policy which concerns SPC. This is the **flexible settlement policy** which will mean in essence that existing fixed development boundaries will no longer realistically exist. The delivery of this policy will suggest conflict and confusion between area boundaries and other legitimate policies such as the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan and permitted development rights. This without doubt would bring substantial pressure on protected areas under National Landscapes, local green spaces and anti-coalescence proposals.

However, notwithstanding the agreement on the BANP, Symondsbury is mostly a large rural Parish, unlike Bridport Town, and despite many similar issues has a different emphasis in areas especially landscape and development. Thus, this review of the issues affecting the Parish to provides a Symondsbury Parish response to the Local Plan Consultation.

The main issues affecting Symondsbury.

The Parish is a large predominantly rural area with a small coastal area (Jurassic Coast) at Eype to the South, a boundary with the larger settlement of Bridport on the more Southeastern boundary closer to the village of Symondsbury with the remainder of the rural area going North towards Broadoak. The need to identify such a significant amount of land to meet this new development target, whilst

also ensuring that the necessary supporting infrastructure is delivered and that valuable environmental and heritage assets are protected, appears to be huge and almost impossible task.

The voting population is about 1000. (See attached Map.)

The key issues are:

Housing: Symondsburry Parish Council (SPC) understands that sustainable development is required to promote a healthy community and economic growth. However, this sustainable development and the necessary changes brought by it should reflect the complex needs of the rural area and its interfaces with the more urban Bridport Town as well as wider Dorset.

The current approach for estimating new housing requirement is to use the government's new standard method which could equate to in excess of an 80% increase compared to what Dorset Council was previously planning for. SPC feels that to find the space for that scale of increase will be difficult if not impossible understanding that like everywhere else in the county, the supporting infrastructure has to be delivered together with the protection of the landscape, environmental and heritage assets. Notwithstanding that increase over historic levels, the detail it requires to deliver, including the land acquisition, design, infrastructure design, preconstruction preparation, materials supply and construction delivery industry, is more than double historic delivery rates.

SPC believe that Dorset Council should not be driven to meet a 'share' of national targets based on a central government target-based method, without properly accounting for local needs and factors, rather than demonstrating what is actually required to meet the need in West Dorset, including Bridport. Issues such as local demographics, protected landscapes and the influx migration of people, especially of the older generation and retirees, exacerbate the low cost, social housing shortage and put pressure on all forms of infrastructure services. The need is for housing which should be a genuine mix to meet the needs of all income groups, including social housing for affordable rent and affordable housing for sale. As such a proposal to project what is actually and objectively required by assessed need is required.

It is clear the majority of houses being built in, around and close to the Parish area are currently of the wrong type, size, amount and tenure together with being built in the wrong location to fully fit the needs of the Parish. It is also clear that that central government housing targets are often arbitrary and inflated to suit a political need rather than solve local issues and do not necessarily relate to infrastructure and protect local environments. SPC shares a clear view with Bridport Town. Both need genuinely affordable housing with a high proportion of social rent. The Housing Chapter of the revised BANP captures the requirement:

"What the area needs most is housing which local people can afford, whether to buy or to securely rent. Although there is no shortage of homes to buy, few local families can afford one. Even to rent privately takes at least half of a typical household's income, and there are not enough properties for Affordable Rent. These factors contribute to the departure of young and less affluent people from the neighbourhood area, resulting in the average age of our area increasing sharply in recent years. To counter this trend a re-focus of priorities is justified.

Therefore, the priorities of the housing policies in this neighbourhood plan are clear: improve the supply of homes both to rent and to buy which the young and less affluent can access; and prioritise the urgent and acute need for affordable, in particular social rented, housing wherever possible."

There must also be a need for a balance between employment, housing and life commitments, which supports the ability to use public transport or walk/cycle to visit, work, shop, attend medical appointments or go to educational facilities this is especially relevant in a rural area. The Parish is mainly rural and as such most site based employment opportunities are out of the area and require commuting. However, the rural area can provide good home working conditions dependent on the availability of good internet access. Affordability of travel between settlements, especially in the north of the Parish, as well as local and distant services together with employment is a key issue when looking at rural development and local employment.

The local town of Bridport is not large and does not attract or provide major site based employment opportunities. However, there are some larger employers with main employers in the seasonal tourism trade reflecting the beauty of the local landscape and country area together with the coastal holiday attraction.

The suggested need for more developments to cater for the older generation is flawed as this stifles the opportunities for the younger generation to work and live close to the area they were raised, close to family and creating local employment opportunities. Older residents do not necessarily have the financial reserves and do put a strain on the medical and social infrastructure as such a balance is required.

Affordability of homes either for rent or for sale is the key issue. The current target of a minimum of 35% affordable housing of all types is currently not reasonable. The Parish considers a minimum of 40% is reasonable with a larger proportion of social rented tenure. A key is to position the affordability throughout the Parish and not always be restricted to the larger developments. However, this number is not always actually achieved or actually built as viability assessments tend to reduce the number and in certain cases can eliminate any commitment to build affordable housing. In addition, some developments achieve planning but are not built out.

There are little opportunity sites in the more rural parts of the Parish such as the north and far west with settlements being mainly hamlets. The main sites for consideration are those within Bridport and on the periphery, mainly to the east.

It should also not be forgotten that the Airbnb letting business is causing substantial issues with the housing market in tourism areas such as Symondsburys, Bridport and the general South Dorset area. Affordable properties are being bought up by Airbnb operators at the expense of local people seeking a genuine home. The trade also affects tourism businesses as there appears to be a black market for letting the houses which means no tax etc is paid. The increased cost of council tax for these Airbnb spaces does have an effect but SPC suggests more should be done to benefit genuine home buyers and tourism businesses.

SPC has considered all the housing opportunity sites presented in the Dorset proposals and suggests relevant and pertinent comment on them that draws on local knowledge, the previous plans and the assessments undertaken in the preparation of the BANP review. **See Figure a) below.**

Infrastructure:

SPC is very concerned about the lack of detailed information, analysis and actual evidence in relation to the capacity of all forms of local and national infrastructure to respond to the uplift required in suggested housing, employment, transport, education and social development across the Parish and interface areas. SPC believes it is essential that the Local Plan process recognizes the need for

detailed understanding of the Parish infrastructure needs and its interfaces with neighbouring areas. Sustainable development requires housing, employment, transport, infrastructure and social development to be developed simultaneously. It is essential that the Dorset Local Plan identifies and secures infrastructure provision through the most appropriate methods.

Public Travel: Apart from the major routes along the A35 and coast road linking Symondsbury and Bridport with Lyme Regis, Dorchester and Weymouth the public service from rural settlements is extremely poor or non-existent. Train services are from Dorchester or Crewkerne in the North and Axminster in the West. All these are difficult to get to economically. There are very few bus services in the rural areas and it is understood that private car journeys or taxis are the preferred method. A typical taxi fare from Broadoak to Bridport is in the region of £10-£11 for a single journey.

Medical: Currently the medical facilities of Doctors surgeries appear to be oversubscribed and the minor injuries unit struggles. This oversubscription may become worse as the Vearse Farm development matures. Even with the fixed financial contribution through the section 106 agreement this will not account for further development and the requirement of manning the increase. Dental Care like most places in the region is difficult with the ability to have new National Health Care treatment almost impossible.

Employment: SPC understands the need for providing the opportunity of providing additional space for employment and business development. This needs to be part of a sustainable development approach alongside housing. The BANP policies protect existing employment sites. However, it must be remembered that Symondsbury is a rural Parish identified with farming and tourism practices with generally only small industrial sites initially developed around and to serve farm sites.

Within Symondsbury there are no site based major employers however there are some larger employers within Bridport and certainly major employers towards Dorchester, Poole and Bournemouth. However, Poole and Bournemouth are at least 1 hour away by car and longer by public transport.

Bridport and Symondsbury do have a track record of small start up businesses within all aspects of commercial, finance, design and retail arenas. The real issue is that, as in public travel above and transport below, when considering access to education, employment, socialising including the development and sustainability of local rural businesses these are difficult to access being outside of rural Symondsbury and the main settlement of Bridport. There is a need to promote Western Dorset as an area to attract key employers and higher educational facilities.

There is a flourishing tourism sector which is obviously mainly seasonal. This does provide considerable opportunity and financial return for all employment areas with the secondary ability for other businesses to succeed. Even so it is noted from many businesses that there is difficulty in finding suitable staff. It is relevant that most of the employment opportunities are on the lower end of the salary scale and have a seasonal influence. Notwithstanding this, tourism is also subject to the global cost of living crisis.

The work from home scenario does help living and working in the rural areas however this still has its own issues such as isolation and access when required. In addition, not all employees are suited to this style of working.

There should be a better link between employment opportunities and education. One suggestion is to attract a higher education facility to the area to offer closer educational facilities as well as training for the employment roles for the Dorset Area in all forms.

SPC consider that new business and commercial space would be better suited alongside the established sites and in addition along the A35 corridor to promote ease of access. SPC has considered the employment opportunity sites and suggests relevant and pertinent comment on them that draws on local knowledge as well as the previous plans and the assessments undertaken in the preparation of the BANP review. **See Figure b)**

Landscape: Symondsbury Parish is within the Dorset Landscapes Area (AONB) and the Jurassic coastal area is within the World Heritage Site designation. The varied landscapes are of vital importance and need to be maintained. A key component of this is the priority to utilise brownfield sites, the new grey area sites and sites with consent but not developed, rather than develop on these greenfield sites of Landscape importance.

It is imperative to allow all settlements to breath and be linked by green, natural landscaped areas. As such developments should not be allowed where they would create substantial harm to the landscape. The requirement of non-coalescence of development areas to allow green spaces to flow and restrict urbanisation and suburbanisation should be a key consideration in reviewing planning development. Thus, where Symondsbury interfaces with Bridport it is essential to maintain green spaces that restrict urban and suburban coalescence. This is key in an area such as Symondsbury which does have a flourishing tourism area especially the enjoyment of close and distant views from and to the coast as well as the inland rural scenes.

This does come under threat with the new proposed flexible development boundaries and it is not clear how successful these will be in conserving the historic, beautiful landscapes within the area.

Connectivity and access: Connectivity is a vital ingredient to creating a vibrant and successful settlement. Thus, public transport, both local and national, road networks, walking and cycling networks are essential in creating sustainable access, together with sustaining and developing settlements as well as supporting the tourism industry.

Symondsbury Parish is not well served by public transport, either bus or rail, mainly due to its elongated rural position. This is disabling, especially financially, when considering access to education, employment and socialising as well as the development and sustainability of local rural businesses outside of the main settlement of Bridport. As such people by necessity rely mainly on private transport or taxis as outlined in public travel above. As mentioned above there are very few bus services in the rural areas and it is understood that private car journeys or taxis are the preferred method. A typical taxi fare from Broad Oak to Bridport is in the region of £10-£11 for a single journey.

Transport: The suggested Transport Plan sets out proposals that would be helpful but does not consider the real rural aspect. The vision and objectives look plausible, however, it is considered that the delivery of the Transport Plan will be hugely reliant on a substantial level of infrastructure investment to change our method of travel. Living in a rural environment is challenging when considering all ages. Currently there is nothing in the Local Plan which would encourage people in rural areas such as Symondsbury Parish to give up private transport for most journeys, whether they are long or short. As mentioned previously there is a need for a balance between employment, housing and life commitments, which supports the ability to use public transport or walk/cycle to visit, work, shop, attend medical appointments or go to educational facilities this is especially relevant in a rural area such as Symondsbury. In the Symondsbury area public transport is very limited or none existent with bus services operating an almost skeletal service very often not connecting with each other especially the train network. The local plan offer does not give

confidence that anything will change and as such private cars and private transport will be the prime choice.

Again, it is clear the Transport Plan lacks detail and analysis to provide confidence that there will be any meaningful change. With this in mind the Local plan should consider how improvements can be made in the event of the most likely scenario of insufficient government funding.

The main arterial route is the A35 trunk road. It is believed that the main trunk route of the A35 in the area is not fit to accommodate further development in its present form and fails consistently on a regular basis (at least weekly) notwithstanding through the seasonal periods of high demand of the national travelling public. The lack of alternative local routes should the A35 fail, consistently leads to gridlocked routes and areas. The secondary routes are rural, narrow and winding with few passing places. In addition, the maintenance of these secondary and tertiary routes is extremely poor. Considerable investment in the repair and maintenance of these failing road surfaces is urgent to avoid complete closure. This transport failure creates severe problems for local residents, national carriers, local business and commuting workers alike, especially affecting the local rural economy.

Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation:

Renewable energy and energy conservation must be considered by all new and regenerated developments of whatever type. In fact all major utilities have to play a part. SPC support the policy that all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy. SPC through the BANP (CC2/3) will promote high levels of energy conservation and renewable energy generation and will support the same through its communities.

Local initiatives will play an important role and should be encouraged to provide positive local benefit from renewable energy conservation and development. Dorset already has policies which give positive weight to renewable and low carbon energy initiatives which have clear evidence of local community involvement and leadership.

A good example of a workable approach to energy conservation and production, close to its boundary with Bridport, is the Bridport Cohousing project called Hazelmead. This is described by Bridport as *"a mixed tenure intergenerational neighbourhood of eco homes (1 bed flats and 2,3, and 4 bed houses) for 53 households that includes a solar-powered microgrid with a large battery system for efficient energy."*

Housing-Figure a)

In appendix A on page 35 of the local plan depicting opportunity sites it shows the large new housing development of Vearse Farm as Brid 1 relating to Bridport. It should be noted that originally this development was within **Symondsbury Parish** and the subsequent recent boundary change allocated a portion of the site to within Bridport. It is essential that this area is allocated in accordance with the boundary change and Symondsbury/Bridport areas identified accordingly.

In coordination with Bridport Town Council, Symondsbury has helped prepare the uplift in the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan which is already made and will set the local requirements for sustainable development in the future. As part of this review/uplift and stated by Bridport Town Council;

"The Site Options Assessment for the BANP review is offered as evidence for the Dorset Local Plan. AECOM were commissioned to undertake an independent site appraisal for the Bridport Area

Neighbourhood Plan (BANP). The work undertaken was agreed with Bridport and Symondsbury Parish Councils (PC) and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2025 as part of the national Neighbourhood Planning Technical Support programme led by Locality.”

These reports are to be used as evidence, modified by local area knowledge, in the submission in terms of the Local Plan consultation.

Proposal LA/SYMO/001

This opportunity site area of land forms part of the Dorset National Landscapes (AONB). The land forms an important part of the anti-coalescence green landscape towards the interface with Bridport Town to allow green space to interface with the town and prevent over urbanisation. Any development would degrade the available green open space that characterises the interface of the Symondsbury Parish with Bridport, together with damaging the close and distant landscape views. It is vitally important to maintain the rural nature of Symondsbury Parish with the benefits of food production and tourism. As such the opportunity site would promote urban development and would cause substantial harm the rural character of the Dorset National Landscapes (ANOB) and not enhance the local landscape character.

Principal comments:

Conflicts with the BANP Anti – Coalescence area policy.

Would cause substantial harm to the Dorset National Landscapes (AONB)

Would promote unacceptable urban development in the countryside.

The proposals do not create an increase in positive Biodiversity.

Further developments would mean a further increase in traffic onto West Road.

It is suggested that infrastructure costs would be substantial and unviable.

Agree with AECOM assessment.

Proposal LA/SYMO/002

This area lies adjacent the existing development of Vearse Farm and does contain heritage buildings. Although the green space it holds would benefit the immediate area the logic of development is understood.

Principal Comments:

Area is supposed to be for a green space at Foundry Lea although it may be beneficial to sacrifice this for other green spaces as the extant consent and 106 agreement identify large areas of internal landscape and surrounding landscape to the development, with key access by the public.

Can understand the logic for an additional development to be built next to Foundry Lea.

Generally agree with AECOM assessment.

Proposal LA/SYMO/004

This opportunity site is adjacent to the A35 and will have the benefit of a direct vehicular access from the new roundabout being constructed for the Vearse Farm development. It is suggested that the lower areas only from the ridge of land continuing from the Broad Lane ridge (as identified in LA/SYMO/005 below) would be beneficial for any opportunity development. This would leave the higher areas to the south as green field and recognising the land forms part of the National Landscapes (AONB) being adjacent to and viewed from the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site. The land forms an important part of the anti-coalescence green landscape towards the interface with Bridport Town to allow green space to interface with the town and prevent over urbanisation.

The site could accommodate mixed use, live work units and affordable accommodation and could be linked in terms of access to the Vearse Farm development for transport needs. Importantly the recent closure of the rest area adjacent to the opportunity site by national Highways for their use as a depot creates an opportunity for a new commercial rest area purpose built for the current traveling public and commercial use, as well as housing and employment.

Principal Comments:

All lower areas could be considered for mixed use development including commercial and employment.

Important potential for access from the proposed roundabout.

Important access link via Vearse farm to employment areas there and to the town.

Helps protect other less viable greenspace areas.

Gate entrance into the field off the A35 is already established.

AECOM assessment – but with some employment.

Proposal LA/SYMO/005

This opportunity site sits on rising and high ground with the ridge line running along Broad Lane. This area of land forms part of the National Landscapes (AONB) being adjacent to and viewed from the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site. The land forms an important part of the anti-coalescence green landscape towards the interface with Bridport Town to allow green space to interface with the town and prevent over urbanisation. Any development would degrade the available green open space that characterises the interface of the Symondsburry Parish with Bridport, together with damaging the close and distant landscape views. It is vitally important to maintain the rural nature of Symondsburry Parish down to the coast with the benefits of food production and tourism. As such the opportunity site would promote urban development and would cause substantial harm the rural character of the National Landscapes (ANOB), the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site area and not enhance the local landscape character.

It is considered that the opportunity site could form a denser urban and suburban settlement which affects the interface of Bridport Town and the rural setting of Symondsburry Parish. The proposals further degrade the holistic setting of the site in terms of the Dorset National Landscapes (AONB). Further this degrades the available green open space that characterises the interface of the

Symondsbury Parish with Bridport creating coalescence of development in contravention of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan.

The opportunity site could promote urban and suburban development which would cause substantial harm the rural character of the Dorset National Landscapes (ANOB) area and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site and detrimentally affect the requirement for green gaps between settlements, creating coalescence of development.

Principal Comments:

The opportunity site does not preserve or enhance to features of the Dorset landscapes (AONB) and World heritage Site. It would add to the coalescence of development detrimentally affecting the green interface between Symondsbury and Bridport and the Jurassic Coast.

The site is isolated and too far from the Bridport Town centre with no public transport.

Broad Lane is single track with passing places between historic hedgerows and private land boundaries. The opportunity site is not suitable for housing and there is no public transport or safe walking cycling routes to local amenities along Broad Lane. As such there is no access to safe pedestrian routes or cycle routes to local amenities.

The proposals do not create an increase in positive Biodiversity.

Notwithstanding the comment in the Local Plan the opportunity site is isolated and does not integrate and connect with neighbouring communities.

It is suggested that infrastructure costs would be substantial and unviable.

Proposal LA/SYMO/010.011

This opportunity site is adjacent to the already established small commercial area and the local Dorset recycling and waste centre.

This opportunity site area of land forms part of the National Landscapes (AONB) being adjacent to and viewed from the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site. The land forms an important part of the anti-coalescence green landscape towards the interface with Bridport Town to allow green space to interface with the town and prevent over urbanisation. Any development would degrade the available green open space that characterises the interface of the Symondsbury Parish with Bridport, together with damaging the close and distant landscape views. The area surrounding most of the existing recycling plant development is seen as a conservation area and should be retained as such. As such the opportunity site would promote urban development and would cause substantial harm the rural character of the National Landscapes (ANOB), the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site area and not enhance the local landscape character.

Some land immediately around the existing development could be used as employment land but is not suitable as a residential site. Some of the land is low lying and can be prone to flooding. It should be noted that the National Highways authority were offered a portion of the land recently for their depot development and refused the same on the grounds of poor ground conditions and potential flooding. There is a traffic controlled access to the site from the A35 but this is restricted to entry

from one direction only. As such substantial works need to be undertaken on the A35 to make the site work which are suggested to be unviable. There is no other viable access.

Principal Comments:

The opportunity site does not preserve or enhance to features of the Dorset landscapes (AONB) and World heritage Site. It would add to the coalescence of urban and suburban development detrimentally affecting the green interface between Symondsbury and Bridport and the Jurassic Coast.

The site is isolated and too far from the Bridport Town centre with no public transport.

Difficult access from the A35.

The proposals do not create an increase in positive Biodiversity.

Employment Figure b)

There is little opportunity for new large employment land sites in this rural area. Like any other rural area employment land suffers from poor transport, access, infrastructure and attracting employees.

Most of the land areas are associated with farming and food production with the additional element of tourism. Most of the employment areas are small, have grown out of diversification and located within or close to the main settlements and certainly close to arterial road routes.

Site north of LA/SYMO/0001

This opportunity site exists at present as an upgraded farm site. It is isolated from infrastructure, transport and good access. It would put further strain onto the limited rural road network and further West Road. The existing employment sites around Bridport would be better suited for extension having closer proximity to arterial road routes.

Principal Comments:

The site is within the Dorset national Landscape (AONB).

There is limited infrastructure.

The site is isolated and too far from the Bridport Town centre with no public transport.

Difficult access from the A35.