

Buckland Newton Parish Council

Buckland Newton Neighbourhood Plan

Update August 2017

Dear Parishioners

The Buckland Newton Neighbourhood Plan has been examined, and the examiner has recommended a number of changes or modifications that have to be accepted if it is to go forward to referendum.

These changes weren't discussed or agreed with the Parish Council, and disappointingly we think they may make the Neighbourhood Plan less effective than we would have liked. These changes can be viewed on www.bncommunityplan.co.uk.

The main thrust of our plan, as submitted, was to limit development over the life of the plan until 2030 to a very modest level, 50% of which should be affordable.

The major change the Independent Examiner has made to our plan is that he has changed the wording to "up to 50% affordable housing" to be built on each site larger than 2 houses. The actual amount will be negotiated at the planning application stage, but West Dorset District Council officers have assured us that the 50% rule should be enforced by development control, although obviously where there is an odd number of houses on a site it may well be slightly less.

The Independent Examiner's Final Report also deleted three sites from our plan, Sites K and L at Duntish and Spring Grove, each for one dwelling, and Site G at Brockhampton Green as it has already gained planning permission since our plan was submitted.

The modified plan will therefore be for a total of 35 homes over the 15 year period of the plan, of which *up to* 16 should be affordable.

There are numerous other, but in our view less significant, changes and these can be viewed on www.bncommunityplan.co.uk.

We had a meeting with the District Council last month to see if changes to the "suggested" modifications could be made, but they were adamant that the modifications had to stand if we wish the plan to continue to go forward to a referendum. However the District Council officers were keen to tell us that there are lot of positive aspects about our plan, and that having a Neighbourhood Plan in place protects the parish from being targeted by developers.

So we have three choices or options, and have to let West Dorset District Council know our decision by the 23rd August at the latest:

Option 1) accept the changes and let our current plan go ahead to referendum and (hopefully) get voted in, adopted and become part of the planning process. We could, down the line, review and make further changes to it if we find elements aren't working as we hope they should.

Option 2) withdraw the plan and do some more work on it, more consultation, and then get it re-examined, and hope that the second time around there will be less need for changes to be made, and the plan gets voted in, adopted and used.

Option 3) withdraw the plan and abandon the project, relying instead on the Local Plan to guide planning decisions for the foreseeable future

There are ‘pro and cons’ for each of the choices or options, which are explained below

1. Go forward with this version of the plan

Pro’s

- It should get adopted and be in use by the end of the year (if most people vote ‘yes’)
- Having a neighbourhood plan in place means planning decisions should be based on our own plan, regardless of whether West Dorset has a healthy supply of housing land
- It allows for some housing to get built – with a target that 50% of these should be affordable (such as social rented and shared ownership), and geared to providing 1, 2 and 3 bedroom homes
- It includes other policies that provide additional design guidance and protects important open spaces
- There is still the future opportunity to update our plan once we see how it is working

Con’s

- The policy wording on the amount of affordable homes is that housing sites should provide ‘up to’ 50% - so there is a risk that we might not get as many as 50% affordable homes, and on some sites the applicant could try to avoid providing any affordable homes. However West Dorset District Council officers felt that they should be able to argue for 50% as affordable in most cases
- The changes made to the housing sites will make it more difficult to justify a legal requirement for them to be offered to local people first, although in reality most people wanting to live here are likely to have a local connection
- Some of the other policy wording about house sizes and standards have been weakened, so again may not be as watertight
- If we do need to change the policies because they don’t work well, this could take some time (as the stages are very similar to preparing a plan from scratch)

2. Withdraw and do some more work on the plan, and get it re-examined

Pro’s

- We can still address the points made by the examiner, but in a way that we think should work better
- We could (if we wanted) include other matters you think we may have missed

Con’s

- It would delay getting the plan adopted until the end of 2018, or perhaps even longer. In the interim decisions would be based (as they currently are) on the West Dorset Local Plan and its general policies
- There are no guarantees that a second Examiner would agree our changes and they could even make further changes we don’t agree with
- We would need to rely on more volunteers and more public money to see it through, and there is a risk further grant funding may not be available

3. Abandon the plan and rely on the West Dorset Local Plan

Pro's

- We can all go home and forget about neighbourhood planning
- There would still be some development taking place - the Local Plan allows infill within the defined development boundary, the re-use of rural buildings (subject to certain criteria), and affordable housing and new employment and community facilities on greenfield sites close to the settlement, subject to the general policies about protecting the landscape, local heritage, wildlife, and requiring good design, safe access etc
- The District Council have also identified land rear of Majors Common as a possible site – this could be allocated for development through the Local Plan Review.

Con's

- The volunteer efforts and public money that has gone into the plan will be wasted
- If West Dorset does not have a healthy housing land supply, we could see planning applications for general housing approved on greenfield sites outside of the defined development boundary, in locations we wouldn't have chosen – though completely unsustainable locations or poor designs should still be refused
- There is a possibility that we would not gain any more affordable housing as developments on small sites may be able to make a financial contribution (to be spent elsewhere in the District) rather than provide a proportion of affordable housing on site
- The District Council, not us, would make the final decision on whether or not to allocate sites in the area to meet local needs, and what those policies should say, although we will be able to comment on any proposals.
- We won't get as much funding to spend locally through the Community Infrastructure Levy than we would have been entitled to from new housing, if we had a neighbourhood plan in place

Although the Parish Council will make the final decision, partly based on advice by the planning professionals, the feedback from parishioners is of great importance.

Currently the Parish Council has a preference for Option 1. Whilst there are minor issues and it puts some of the decision making back into the hands of the development control planners instead of the community, we will get a substantial amount of what we proposed.

The Parish Council feels Option 2 has risks, in that we may put in a lot of work and 18 months down the line still not get what we want with a different Independent Examiner.

Option 3 runs the risk of getting housing in locations we don't want if the District Council does not achieve its housing targets, and not delivering the affordable homes we need.

However, this is your village and the way it develops will affect you. Please find a few moments to give us your views on how we should proceed. This can be done by completing the tear off slip below and return to the Parish Council by the 21st August at the latest, by

- leaving in the box at the Old Chapel Stores
- emailing your preference to bucklandnewton@dorset-aptc.gov.uk
- by post to the Parish Clerk, Hartmoor Farm, Pulham, Dorchester, DT2 7ED
- or by leaving it at one of the drop-in session (see below)

Please provide your name and address – this will remain confidential.

If you wish to know a little more before making your decision, the Parish Council is holding a number of drop-in events at the Parish Room:

10.00 am – 12.30 pm	Tuesday 15th August
2.00 pm – 4.30 pm	Wednesday 16th August
7.00 pm – 9.00 pm	Thursday 17th August

We will have copies of the Neighbourhood Plan available as modified by the Independent Examiner, which will be the version you will vote on if we decide to go to referendum.

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Buckland Newton Neighbourhood Plan.

My preference is

1. Go forward with this version of the plan
2. Withdraw and do some more work on the plan, and get it re-examined
3. Abandon the plan and rely on the West Dorset Local Plan

Name (in confidence):

Address (in confidence):