

SWANAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

ADOPTED SWANAGE LOCAL PLAN POLICIES REVIEW: OCTOBER 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 A review session was held with members of the Swanage Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) on 26 October 2022. The purpose of the session was to assess the success or otherwise of the 10 policies of the adopted Swanage Local Plan (SLP) of June 2017 to guide the scope and nature of its full replacement by the new Swanage Neighbourhood Plan (SNP). The session also reflected on the changing national and strategic planning policy context since the adoption of the SLP, notably with revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the progress of the Purbeck Local Plan 2 (PLP2) and of the first Dorset Local Plan (DLP).

1.2 This report summarises the nature of the discussion held and makes recommendations for how the project should proceed. It includes an updated analysis of the SLP policies, noting any key modifications that are advised, as well as some further analysis of potential additional policy ideas. Finally it notes how the project may be structured to carry out the evidence and modification work.

2. Policy Context

2.1 There have been revisions to the NPPF since SLP was adopted. SLP was examined against the 2012 version and there have been some changes that are relevant to the review. The NPPF now makes clearer the distinction between strategic (i.e. district-wide Local Plan only) and non-strategic policy and provides a means by which neighbourhood plans can align their housing supply policies with an emerging Local Plan (through indicative housing targets – see §66). It also contains a mechanism by which some types of neighbourhood plan can retain their full weight even if the planning authority loses its housing land supply position (see §14). In most other respects, however, the latest NPPF (of 2021) continues to assert the same spatial policy objectives in respect of balancing growth with environmental constraints. If and how this changes with the wider review of the planning system – most recently framed within the Levelling Up & Infrastructure Bill – is still too early to tell.

2.2 The local planning authority, Dorset Council (DC), is bringing forward the first county-wide DLP but this project has stalled pending a resolution from Government on how planning authorities should plan for housing supply. The project, which will cover the plan period 2021 – 2038, had reached the consultation draft (Regulation 18) stage in early 2021, which included a section (13) on Swanage comprising four policy proposals:

- SWAN1: Town Centre – rolling forward policies STC, TCR and KCD of the SLP
- SWAN2: Northbrook Road East – rolling forward the one remaining unimplemented SLP allocation
- SWAN3: Land West of Prospect Allotments – proposing an additional allocation for 150 homes (which may include a care home facility)
- SWAN4: Townscape Character – rolling forward Policy STCD of the SLP

2.3 At the time this document was published, the Town Council (TC) has not proposed to replace the SLP with the SNP and so the DLP makes no mention of it in its Appendix 2, which sets housing requirements for neighbourhood plans or in its Appendix 1, which defines strategic (SWAN2 and SWAN3) and non-strategic (SWAN1 and SWAN4) policies. The working assumption for the project must now be an agreement between DC and the TC that SNP will take responsibility for planning for the town in the period to 2038 and not the DLP.

2.4 In the meantime, DC has continued to progress the PLP2, which is now at examination and will replace the Purbeck Local Plan 1 (PLP1) adopted in 2012 by rolling forward the plan end date to 2034. PLP2 will sit alongside the SLP (until it is replaced by the SNP) and contains some important development management policies that apply to Swanage, namely:

- E1 landscape (* strategic)
- E2 historic environment
- E6 coastal change management areas*
- E7/E9 habitat conservation/Poole Harbour*
- H2 housing land supply (originally setting Swanage a target of 150 homes based on the residual of the 200 homes allocated by the SLP, now 40 homes)*
- H8 small housing sites (of up to 30 homes adjoining the town boundary)*
- H9 housing mix (on schemes of > 20 homes, 5% self-build, 10% bungalows)*
- H11 affordable housing (20% - 40% - on schemes of 10 homes or more, 10% social rent:65% affordable rent:25% intermediate mix with a variance for brownfield sites)*
- H14 second homes (on all sites in the AONB)
- EE1 employment land supply (safeguarding the Prospect Business Park and Victoria Avenue Estate sites in Swanage)*
- EE4 tourism

- I1 infrastructure (combination of CIL and S106)*
- I3 green infrastructure*
- I7 community facilities

2.5 The PLP2 examination has not yet been completed and DC has consulted on Main Modifications. They include:

- adding to Policy V1 (spatial strategy) the Swanage allocation of 40 homes of Policy H2 and the small sites provisions of Policy H8
- caveating Policy H8 to disapply it in areas with neighbourhood plans that have allocated small sites
- allowing neighbourhood plans to define a different housing mix to that in policies H9 and H11
- encouraging neighbourhood plans to set out local design policy (in E12)
- excluding new homes intended for commercial letting but restricting such lettings to that use in Policy H14
- allowing for tourism activities and accommodation outside the town boundary in Policy EE4
- allowing neighbourhood plans to set bespoke car parking standards in Policy I2
- requiring alignment of neighbourhood plan green infrastructure and local green space policies with the Purbeck Green Infrastructure Strategy

2.6 It is expected the examination will end in early 2023 and the PLP2 adopted soon after. In which case, the timing of making the SNP will mean that PLP2 will form the basis of the ‘development plan’ against which the SNP will be judged for being ‘in general conformity’ as part of meeting the ‘basic conditions’ tests. However, despite the current delay, the DLP is likely to be adopted early in the lifetime of the SNP. It is therefore important that the SNP looks towards both PLP2 and DLP in framing its policies.

3. Change in the Neighbourhood Area

3.1 The town has seen the build out of two of the three housing schemes allocated in PLP1 to deliver approx. 150 homes and some smaller infill and redevelopment schemes. The third of those schemes (at the former grammar school site) was approved in early 2022. However, the change encouraged by the SLP on the Kings Road West (TCR) and Kings Court Depot (KCD) sites and the Post Office Sorting Depot has not happened.

3.2 The town centre has seen a turnover in units and some loss to non-town centre uses but has survived the challenges of the last few years relatively well. The main food store – the Co-op – upgraded its premises in 2021 for a unit that is likely to continue to be ‘over-trading’. It also plans to extend its Sandford store. The two main industrial estates continue to be well utilised.

- 3.3 The ambitions of connecting the town's station to the mainline at Wareham have not been implemented other than during the summer season. A community land trust (CLT) for the town has been established (with a potential land acquisition at the Kings Court Depot site); proposals have been made for a new sea defence project; ideas to create a multi-function centre at Days Park are ongoing; a project to rejuvenate the Mowlem Centre has begun; and proposals are being designed for a new community bus service.
- 3.4 In general terms those challenges the town faced five years ago – access to affordable housing, an aging population, a town centre very dependent on tourism, inadequate convenience food retail capacity/choice and peak seasonal traffic congestion among others – remain much the same. The new homes built, and to be built, have helped deliver market and affordable housing to meet local needs, but have not been of a scale or location to contribute to finding solutions to those challenges.
- 3.5 The short life span of the PLP2 and forthcoming DLP are forcing the TC to consider the longer term future of the town. As one of the largest towns in the county and a relatively sustainable location for growth, albeit one at the end of a peninsula, it should be expected that strategic policy will continue to want Swanage to contribute to local housing supply. The draft DLP has shown DC's hand in respect of its assessment of the greenfield and brownfield opportunities to accommodate that growth. The SNP need not come to the same answer, but if it does not, it will have to explain why not, and justify why and how a different answer should be planned for.
- 3.6 Although the session did not address the SLP vision specifically, its goals did frame the full discussion. It is noted that both PLP2 and the DLP shared the goal of the town continuing to serve its community and visitors and to accommodate change within its heritage and environmental capacity. Underlying the vision is the desire of the town to manage this goal in ways that will enable it to become more self-sufficient, a crucial feature of any peninsula settlement of any size. It is observed that planning policy in recent years has sought to tackle this challenge in tactical, single land-use (primarily housing), ways without thinking about the longer term and seeking to understand and define the full spatial and infrastructure limits of the town.

4. The SLP Policy Assessment

4.1 The following table sets out a summary assessment of the SLP policies. The assessment has benefited from not just the discussion at the session but also from the regular monitoring of planning application decisions by the TC.

New No.	SLP No.	POLICY TITLE	NOTES & RECOMMENDATIONS
SNP1	SS	Swanage Settlement	3 x allocations (200 homes at Northbrook Road E & W and Prospect Farm) + SANG + settlement boundary modification. Reference to Prospect Farm allotments affordable housing idea (but not in policy). Recommend a new sites assessment process, with a special focus on brownfield and infill site design coding and delivery mechanisms (a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) and/or the Swanage CLT?). Includes a full review of the TCR and KCD sites in respect of housing (see below). The outcome may not only find a better solution than the DLP site allocation proposal but may also enable the small sites provision of its Policy H8 to be disappplied on the edges of Swanage as well.
SNP2	SHM	Housing Mix	Defers to the SHMA. Recommend update evidence – apply for a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) package via Locality to inform this policy on housing type/tenure and site-specific policies.
SNP5	STCD	Townscape Character	STCA + 2x AHTV + 4x ADLC but not the Conservation Area (which is to be reviewed). Noted DLP SWAN4 repeats. Noted that the Purbeck Society has a list of local heritage assets including in Swanage. Recommend simplifying design policy into a new policy using a design code, which may coincide the review of the Conservation Area. Use National Model Design Code structure, possibly using Locality package and/or Create Streets to code specific sites.
SNP4	STC	Town Centre	Boundary + primary/secondary shopping frontages + new food and non-food retail (2014 data) + TCR site. Noted PLP2 EE3 and DLP SWAN1 roll forward. Recommend commissioning an updated retail review (mix, floorspace etc) as PLP2 evidence is pre-Covid and out of date. Also need to update policy wording to reflect Class E and PDR (Class MA).

SNP3	TCR	Town Centre Redevelopment Site	Kings Road West/Station. New retail + health centre + town square + residential. Exceptional circumstance for alternative use mix subject to viability appraisal. Recommend a review of the policy delivery with a view to changing the mix etc and design coding, and consider using a parallel NDO to implement?
SNP3	KCD	Kings Court Depot Site	Former depot + business centre. Employment + residential + relocated retail. Recommend a review of the policy delivery with a view to changing the mix etc and design coding, and consider using a parallel NDO to implement?
-	ES	Employment Sites	Protection of Prospect Business Park and Victoria Avenue Industrial Estate. Recommend delete and default to PLP2 Policy EE1. Noted reference to PO Sorting Office but not in policy – consider either as part of new town centre and/or housing policies.
SNP6	SGI	Green Infrastructure	Defers to GI Strategy. Recommend the GI strategy is examined alongside biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery initiatives to consider updating the mapping and policy coverage.
SNP7	OSR	Open Space & Recreation	Safeguarded sites. Recommend a review of open spaces with a view to identifying those that qualify as Local Green Spaces (as per NPPF §102) with the others addressed by PLP2 Policy I4.
-	SA	Allotments	New provision – criteria not allocation. Recommend consider future replacement provision if Prospect Allotments are assessed for affordable housing scheme.

5. Potential Additional NP Policies

5.1 Some additional policy ideas were discussed, leading from those of the SLP and from changes to national policy and from the emergence of PLP2 and DLP. Those that directly relate to existing SLP policies have been referenced above. For example, there was some interest expressed at the session in the SNP adding policies on climate change related topics. This is becoming common policy territory for neighbourhood plans, which are quickly responding to the changing national policy landscape – the Environment Act 2021 will mean that biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery become legal obligations in November 2023, at least at the development management stage. More is emerging on how plan making should embrace these ideas but it is still early days; other neighbourhood plans that are further advanced are pointing to the possible options that the SNP could include.

5.2 The ideas that were briefly discussed were:

No.	TITLE	NOTES
-	Second homes	As PLP2 Policy H14 has addressed this. Recommend no need for a Swanage policy.
SNP8	Community facilities	Recommend using the list of facilities in SLP §232 to create a new policy to engage PLP2 Policy I7.
SNP8	Multi-function centre	Recommend reviewing ambitions of SLP §252 in the light of progress made since to decide if a site specific policy will help reduce planning risk for the proposal.
SNP8	Heritage centre/museum	Recommend reviewing ambitions of SLP §255 in the light of progress made since (related to the Mowlem Centre?) to decide if a site specific policy will help reduce planning risk for the proposal.
SNP9	Coastal/flood defence	Recommend this ambition (SLP §260) is considered as part of the new Swanage Seafront Masterplan project to decide if there is any value to add to PLP2 Policy E6.
SNP8	Cemetery extension	Recommend reviewing ambitions of SLP §273 in the light of progress made since to decide if a site specific policy will help reduce planning risk for the proposal.
SNP8	Health care provision	Recommend reviewing ambitions of SLP §276 in the light of progress made since to decide if a site specific policy will help reduce planning risk for the proposal.

5.3 Should the SNP make provision for development site allocations then it is expected DC will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the draft and final proposed policies. These are parallel processes for which technical support packages are offered (for free) via Locality.

5.4 More generally it is recommended that the SNP should include some new text explaining the successes of SLP, although its general structure and content may differ from the SLP. The provision of new consolidated Policy Maps will show how the policies are understood and applied.

6. Project Structure

- 6.1 A first recommendation is that the NPSG arranges a session to define and test a small number of plausible scenarios for the long term future of the town (as noted in relation to the vision in §3.6 above). This need not be a ‘naval gazing exercise’ but a practical review of where are the essential spatial and infrastructure limits to the town and how future brownfield and greenfield growth can be focused on correcting imbalances between the population and supporting infrastructure (transport, green, commercial, utilities etc). This facilitated session will need to be well prepared to achieve its intended output: a report shaping the direction for most if not all of the existing and additional policy work set out in section 5.
- 6.2 Once that is completed and agreed by the NPSG, it is recommended that it sets up two task teams to take forward the SLP modifications and, in doing so, to explore the potential new ideas further: a **Development Task Team (DTT)** and an **Environment Task Team (ETT)**. The DTT would be an amalgamation of the ‘Housing’ and ‘Town Centre’ themed groups that have previously been envisaged by the TC; the ETT would be the ‘Conservation’ and ‘Environment’ groups. This is considered a more manageable approach to delivering the recommended tasks than four groups.
- 6.3 The division of tasks between the two teams can be decided when the scope of the SNP is agreed, although most tasks fall naturally into one or the other (but it is important to balance the work effort as equally as possible). If possible, all NPSG members should attend one or the other. An NPSG member should chair each team and should be responsible for reporting back progress to the NPSG. Specifically, each team will be given a project brief (an ‘action plan’) agreed by the NPSG that sets out what needs to be explored (e.g. planning application decisions, publicly available data sets) and analysed to produce a set of outline policy proposals (not drafted policies, they follow later in the process). Some SLP policy modifications are straightforward, and we will recommend them to NPSG in due course, leaving the teams to focus on the more challenging policies, new ideas, new evidence and analysis.
- 6.4 Either part way through those tasks, or towards their end, NPSG should decide to engage with the local community to test out emerging task team ideas, e.g. site allocations, design coding. It will be vital that the community is able to participate in expressing policy preferences and validating (or otherwise) emerging evidence before policy ideas are formulated too far. This will be for the NPSG to judge but formulating an early ‘communications plan’ is normally a very helpful first step in this regard.

7. Project Plan, Professional & Technical Support

- 7.1 We have prepared an outline project plan (see separate spreadsheet). It shows the activities across the stages of plan making through to submission. The stages thereafter – examination and referendum – are managed by Dorset Council. The project plan shows how we will deploy our support based on our experience on other similar projects. It also shows the dependency of some tasks on others to enable the NPSG to understand and plan for the consequences of slippage. The goal has been to show how the project may feasibly be completed by spring 2024.
- 7.2 We will advise the NPSG through its monthly meetings (normally online, though we need not attend every meeting) and by liaison between the key officers in the meantime. We will run the scenario session and then work with the DTT and ETT by running a joint orientation meeting (explaining the brief etc) and then liaising with their respective chairs as they progress – we are likely to need to attend at least one other DTT/ETT meeting before their work has ended. Once the Reg 14 stage has been reached it is most likely that the task teams will no longer be needed.
- 7.3 An application to Locality should be made immediately to request an HNA and an SEA/HRA package. The DTT should consider first how it wishes to approach design policy (in new Policy SMP5 above) before deciding if and how to deliver a design code. We will oversee the Locality contractor briefing and manage the quality and timing of their outputs on behalf of the NPSG as we normally do for clients.
- 8.4 The scope of project work assumes that DC officer time will be limited, and becoming more limited as its resources are focused on completing PLP2 and restarting the DLP. It will be vital that liaison is positive and timely so that the PLP2, DLP and SNP policies synchronise well. To this end, it will be helpful to discuss this report with them once approved by the NPSG; to invite an officer to attend occasional NPSG meetings; and to seek their informal views on the first draft SNP before the statutory Reg 14 version. It is also noted that the recommended scope of the SNP will require an SEA and a site assessment process to be operated. Neither are difficult but both take time to operate efficiently as per the regulations and guidance.

Development Task Team

Actions arising from meeting held on 3rd February 2023

Attended by:

Cllr Nicola Rogers (lead), Cllr Mike Whitwam, Mel Norris, Gary Richardson and Andrew Larner, supported by the Town Clerk and Planning & Community Engagement Manager.

The meeting agreed that a practical vision for Swanage was required, beyond the initial statement of intent as a focus for both task groups and the plan as a whole. This would best be done once we have done and/or updated the following key metrics and our understanding of key planning policies:-

DTTA1 – SNP1/SS Swanage Settlement

Agreed initial approach is to ‘stress test’ the existing Dorset Council proposal for 150 house settlement extension on former Prospect Farm land – are there alternative proposals that could sustainably accommodate these housing numbers?

TC/P&CEM to gather the following info for review at the next DTT meeting:

- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
- Swanage Local Plan Housing Site Selection and Housing Mix Background Paper, Sept 2015
- Latest housing delivery monitoring reports for Swanage from Dorset Council
- Existing planning policy on split between settlement extension and windfall sites
- Swanage Town Council’s response to Dorset Local Plan consultation, 2020

DTTA2 – SNP2/SHM Swanage Housing Mix

P&CEM to take steps towards commissioning Housing Needs Assessment via Locality and understand how consultant can be briefed.

DTTA3 – SNP3/TCR Redevelopment Site

P&CEM to ascertain next steps for commissioning Retail Review in order to gauge up to date allocation of retail floorspace for Swanage.

DTTA4 – SNP4/STC Town Centre

TC – Access Goad maps to facilitate assessment of retail change in the Town Centre over last 3-5 years.

DTTA5 – SNP8 Community Facilities/Health Care Provision

TC/P&CEM to meet with Medical Practice representatives to ascertain their future requirements and data that they may be able to share to inform assessment of sustainability of future development.

DTTA6 – Membership of DTT

Invite Councillor Monkhouse and representative of Chamber of Trade to attend future meetings.

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 28th February 2023, at the Town Hall @ 2.00pm