

Minutes of the **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING** of the
Swanage Town Council held via Zoom on **WEDNESDAY**
10th MARCH 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor M.P. Bonfield – Chairman

Councillor A. Harris

Councillor C. Finch – from 4.35 p.m.

Councillor T. Foster

Councillor D. Monkhouse

Councillor C. Moreton

Councillor N. Rogers

Councillor G. Suttle

Councillor C. Tomes

Councillor M. Whitwam

In addition to Members of the Council and officers, seven members of the public and two members of the local press attended the Meeting.

Before opening the Meeting, the Chairman welcomed members of the local press.

Public Participation Time

The following matters were raised:-

- **Dorset Council's consultation on the draft Dorset Local Plan**
 - A question raised as to why the Washpond Lane site (Section 4.11.) had been put forward for consultation again when it had previously been rejected as unsuitable following a Dorset-wide public consultation in 2011-2012. The Chairman confirmed that the previous proposal/consultation had been undertaken by Purbeck District Council, and that this proposal had been put forward by Dorset Council.
 - Concerns expressed regarding road safety in Washpond Lane.
 - A question raised as to who owned the site in Washpond Lane. It was confirmed by the Town Clerk that Dorset Council was the owner of the site.

The Chairman opened the Council Meeting at 4.40 p.m.

132. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for his inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillor Trite.

133. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with paragraphs 9 - 13 of the Council's Code of Conduct and regulations made under chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011.

Councillor Tomes declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of the draft retail policy due to his employment in his family's convenience store, as recorded in his register of interests.

134. **DORSET COUNCIL – PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT DORSET LOCAL PLAN – TO CONSIDER THE TOWN COUNCIL’S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION**

Further to Minute No. 5 a) of the Meeting of the Planning and Consultation Committee held on 1st March 2021, and two informal councillor workshops held on 8th February and 1st March 2021, consideration was given to the Town Council’s draft response to Dorset Council’s consultation on the draft Dorset Local Plan. The Town Council’s comments centred around support for retention of the policies set out in the Swanage Local Plan, which had been adopted in 2017 following many years of public engagement.

Councillors discussed each section of the draft response, and in a number of places requested that the tone should be made more robust, for example replacing ‘should’ with ‘must’ and ‘requests’ with ‘strongly advocates’ etc.

Following his declaration of interest under Minute No.133 above, Councillor Tomes left the Meeting during the discussion and vote in respect of Policy SWAN1: Swanage Town Centre.

The draft response expressed continued support for Policy SWAN1’s aim of focussing retail development in the town centre. However, it also questioned the deliverability of the proposals set out in this section of the draft plan. During the ensuing discussion, debate centred on the statement in the draft response that ‘the Town Council would encourage Dorset Council to explore alternative options to meet the identified need for increased retail floorspace’. Attention was drawn to the vital importance of meeting local residents’ retail needs so as to minimise out-of-town shopping visits to the conurbation. It was agreed that any future development should be managed so as not to damage the viability of existing town centre businesses. After lengthy debate it was proposed by Councillor Suttle and seconded by Councillor Moreton:

That the Town Council approves the wording
in the draft response to Policy SWAN1.

Upon being put to the Meeting there were SEVEN votes IN FAVOUR, ONE AGAINST and ONE ABSTENTION whereupon the proposition was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Tomes re-entered the Meeting.

Members strongly approved of the grounds of objection to Policy SWAN3, the allocation of land to the west of Prospect Allotments for the construction of 150 houses. Concerns were not only expressed around the impact on the landscape and the AONB, but also over the strain that such additional development would place on local infrastructure.

In respect of Section 3: Environment, it was agreed that the Dorset Local Plan should stipulate that all planning applications for new housing must include provision for a renewable energy supply and electric car charging points.

Turning to Section 4.11 of the Draft Plan regarding sites for Gypsies, Travellers and travelling showpeople, concern was expressed that the proposal for the field on the corner of Washpond Lane and Ulwell Road had not been referenced in the Swanage section of the plan. Members also questioned why this proposal had been revived given the fact that it had previously been ruled out following public consultation in 2012. The grounds for objection set out in the draft response were agreed.

In relation to the consultation process on the draft plan, Members wished to highlight their concern over the short timescale for the public to make their response with regards to a document of such vital importance to Dorset’s local communities. This

contrasted unfavourably with other Dorset Council consultations, such as that regarding the Public Space Protection Order relating to dog control and the forthcoming Community Governance Review. The poor functionality of the consultation pages on Dorset Council's website was also highlighted.

Finally, a request was made to include specific reference to the protection of the business premises in Commercial Road. Concern was raised regarding recent conversions of retail/commercial properties to residential use, given that these were often smaller units ideal for start-up businesses.

Taking into consideration the points raised in the debate, it was proposed by Councillor Rogers, seconded by Councillor Suttle and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the Town Council's draft response to the consultation on the draft Dorset Local Plan (excluding the section on Policy SWAN 1 approved above) be agreed for submission to Dorset Council, incorporating the amendments raised during the debate on this item.

A copy of the agreed response is included at the end of these Minutes for information.

135. **ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS**

- (a) A reminder was given that the Swanage Area Forum's People's Assembly on the draft Dorset Local Plan was being held on Friday 12th March 2021 at 7.30 p.m.

Following discussions Members passed on their thanks and appreciation to officers for their work in compiling the Town Council's response to the consultation.

The meeting concluded at 5.55 p.m.



Swanage Town Council – response to Dorset Council’s public consultation on the draft Dorset Local Plan

SECTION 13: SWANAGE

Swanage Local Plan (SLP) 2016-2027

The proposals for Swanage outlined within the draft Dorset Local Plan are not sufficiently aligned with the policies and objectives of the adopted Swanage Local Plan which currently covers new development up to 2027.

The Town Council’s overarching desire is to see the Swanage Local Plan retained as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Prior to its adoption in 2017 the SLP was developed over a 5-year period of active engagement with Swanage residents and therefore carries the broad support of the local community. The Town Council requests that this is kept in place until 2027 which will allow the Town Council time to consider the development of a Neighbourhood Plan, whilst still providing the town with the protection of existing SLP policies until 2027.

If the plan *cannot* be retained then more of its content should be incorporated into the Dorset Local Plan. The Swanage-specific section of the plan (6 pages) is inadequate in comparison with that for similar sized towns (e.g. Blandford, Bridport, Sherborne and Wimborne all of which cover between 10 and 20 pages).

Policy SWAN1: Swanage Town Centre

The Town Council is pleased to note that this policy retains the boundary and designation of retail frontages, as set out in policy STC of the SLP.

The Town Council has no objection to Policy SWAN1 and the opportunities for expansion around the Co-Operative Food Store, Kings Court Business Centre (former Town Council Depot site) and Post Office, and the potential relocation of current town centre uses to the Kings Court site, as set out in policy TCR of the SLP.

However, the Town Council does have real concerns over the deliverability of the proposal as set out in policy SWAN1. This policy has been in development for close-on a decade and there is no indication that the relevant parties are actively engaged in taking forward this proposal. Furthermore, concerns have been raised that the existing retail offering in the town centre by the larger food stores is inadequate and expensive for local people (there are pockets of deprivation in the town). The impact of not providing an adequate shopping experience in the town is that a sizeable number of local residents regularly drive out of town to shop, therefore driving the local economy down, and adding to the traffic and environmental issues affecting the already congested A351. This would be exacerbated by the residents of the proposed 150 new homes in the proposed settlement extension.

In light of the above concerns, the Town Council would encourage Dorset Council to explore alternative options to meet the identified need for increased retail floorspace. In support of this, reference is made to point **13.1.5. of the Plan** 'The main challenge for the Swanage area is to ensure its sustainability is maintained and enhanced by reducing the need for residents to travel out of the town for work, shopping and leisure. This all needs to be achieved whilst protecting the outstanding natural environment that makes it popular.'

The Town Council would also wish to highlight its concerns regarding the Commercial Road area (situated in the town's secondary shopping area) which provides excellent 'starter units' and much needed storage facilities for local businesses. In recent years some of the commercial units have been lost to residential development, and there is a real potential for the loss of further units, which should be safeguarded.

There is a ready market for small commercial units in the town centre and the Town Council believes that it will be essential for this area to be protected. Policy STC of the Swanage Local Plan, and Policy RP of the Purbeck Local Plan (Economy, Swanage Town Centre, points 196 to 208 refer) seeks to safeguard existing retail provision, and commercial units, in the town centre.

Policy SWAN2: Northbrook Road East

The Town Council has no objection to this policy, in so far as it is consistent with Policy SS of the SLP.

Policy SWAN3: Land to the west of Prospect Allotments

The Town Council strongly objects to the allocation of 150 houses on land to the west of Prospect Allotments set out in Policy SWAN3, which was not considered as part of the public consultation carried out prior to adoption of the SLP only four years ago.

Significant development has already been undertaken/is being undertaken in the town, namely Smith's Farm (20 units), planning permission for the former St Mary's School site (30 units), the development west of Northbrook Road (90 units - not all complete/sold), and the (lapsed) planning permission for 52 units on the east side of Northbrook Road and application for outline planning permission for a possible further 39 houses on the old Grammar School site (potential for a further 91 units). The total of new properties exceeds the Swanage Local Plan allocation of 200 new homes (of which 50% should be affordable) in accordance with policy SE (South East Purbeck) of PLP1. The Town Council believes that these numbers, which do not include the many other developments which have also been approved since adoption of the SLP, are more than adequate for the town/local community given the lack of additional infrastructure, facilities and employment.

The Council feels that the proposal for 150 new homes on this site, which is currently used as farmland, is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and outside of the existing settlement boundary, is unacceptable for reasons of inadequate infrastructure, public services and transport; landscape impact; potential flooding; and no increase in the supply of employment land.

- Any development in this location is contrary to policy. The Council has stated that 'residential development would represent an uncharacteristic extension beyond the well-defined settlement boundary' (see SHLAA site assessment 2019 [DCP Shelaa - Site details \(westdorset-weymouth.gov.uk\)](https://www.westdorset-weymouth.gov.uk)).
- It is not acceptable to allocate large settlement extensions outside of the settlement boundary, in the open countryside and thereby having a detrimental impact on the AONB. The proposed development would detract from the quality of the local environment, the site being visually prominent upon the entrance to Swanage along the A351. The draft Dorset Local Plan requires all development to conserve and enhance the landscape. However, due to the topography and elevated position of the site this would be impossible to achieve and would cause harm to the landscape character and adversely affect its natural beauty. This means that any development in this area would be prominent and have a greater impact on the AONB.
- The draft Local Plan policy ENVV4 states that within the AONB major development should be refused unless there are exceptional circumstances. In respect of development in Swanage, exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated.
- The site is within 5km of protected heathlands but there is no mention of the heathland mitigation required to accommodate such a sizeable development.
- All new development is required to be sustainable. This cannot be achieved in Swanage as Swanage does not have the infrastructure and no evidence has been provided to suggest that this can be mitigated. Any development in Swanage would not reduce the need to travel due to the limited employment, retail and leisure opportunities available. Concerns are also held regarding the inadequacy of local community services e.g. doctors/dentists' surgeries and schools, most of which are already oversubscribed, and limited public transport services.
- Major concerns are held regarding the inadequate transport infrastructure, in particular the A351, which already suffers regular instances of acute traffic congestion and gridlock throughout the year, and the environmental impact of this. The Town Council would also refer Dorset Council to the recent consultation undertaken by the Purbeck Transport Action Group, and the Group's recently published Purbeck Transport Strategy.

In light of the above concerns, reference is again made to point **13.1.5. of the Plan** 'The main challenge for the Swanage area is to ensure its sustainability is maintained and enhanced by reducing the need for residents to travel out of the town for work, shopping and leisure. This all needs to be achieved whilst protecting the outstanding natural environment that makes it popular.'

Policy SWAN4: Swanage townscape character and development

The SWAN4 policy focuses only on compliance with the Swanage Townscape Character Assessment 2012.

Swanage Local Plan Policy STCD: Townscape Character and Development identified two areas of 'high townscape value' (Swanage and Herston Conservation Areas) and four areas of 'distinctive local character' at Ballard Estate, De Moulham Estate (north and south of Beach Gardens) and Durlston (former 'houses in large gardens' policy area).

The Town Council believes that it is extremely important that Policy STCD of the SLP is retained and incorporated into Policy SWAN4 of the draft Dorset Local Plan as it is vitally important that any new development should protect and enhance the local characteristics of these areas in order to maintain the special character of the town. To that end the Town Council would welcome further engagement with Dorset Council around the designation of further such areas, e.g. the Edwardian development of 'New Swanage'.

Section 2: Development Strategy

DEV1: Overall Housing Numbers

The Town Council would wish to raise concerns regarding the method of calculation/basis upon which the level of development required across the county has been determined. Ultimately, housing numbers need to reflect local need not national housing targets.

The number of new homes proposed in the Plan appears to be in excess of Dorset's local housing need in the plan period. It has been calculated using the government's Standard Method for assessing housing growth and seems to have been accepted without challenge by Dorset Council. The Town Council would ask whether the government's recently published response to the 'Changes to the current planning system' consultation will have any impact on proposals in the draft Dorset Local Plan?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system/outcome/government-response-to-the-local-housing-need-proposals-in-changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

2.8. Meeting the need for employment land

Section 5 Economy – 5.3 Key Employment Sites and Map - ECON1

It is noted that Victoria Avenue Industrial Estate, Prospect Business Park and Kings Court Business Centre are included on the map of Swanage in the Plan, and are listed as key employment sites in Appendix 6. The Town Council is supportive of this in so far as it is in accordance with Policy ES of the SLP. The status of Kings Court, however, should remain as set out in Policy KCD of the Swanage Local Plan.

Swanage Section 13.3.2 states that 'The employment sites that serve the town are both vibrant but have little space available for further development. Future employment space could be met through regeneration of the town providing office and starter units.' This acknowledgement of the limited employment opportunities and the limited scope for growth at these sites underpins many of the Town Council's concerns regarding the number of proposed new homes for the town (policies SWAN2 & SWAN3).

Section 3: Environment

The Town Council welcomes the devotion of a significant section of the draft Dorset Local Plan to environmental issues. However, the Town Council would encourage Dorset Council to be bolder in its approach, requiring sustainable building design principles to be applied to all new development to minimise environmental impact, and making all new development carbon neutral.

Renewable energy – proposals for all new building developments should incorporate provision for renewable energy and electric car charging points, which would reduce their carbon footprint.

3.2. Green infrastructure strategic approach

Whilst the Town Council welcomes the wording of the Green Infrastructure Strategic Approach this is no substitute for the town's own Green Infrastructure Strategy which was adopted in June 2018.

Under the existing SLP, Policy SGI ensures that all development must take into account improvements to the green infrastructure of Swanage in accordance with the Swanage Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS). A number of years' work was put into the research, creation and development of the Swanage GIS and the Town Council would therefore request that it is retained as a Supplementary Planning Document. This approach appears to be being used elsewhere in the DLP, for example in the reference to the Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan in Policy D5.

Swanage Allotments

The SLP Policy SA: Swanage Allotments supports the provision of allotments outside of the Swanage settlement boundary, providing these do not harm the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Town Council would request that this policy is retained and incorporated into the Swanage Section of the draft Dorset Local Plan. This would be important in providing opportunities for accessible allotment plots around the parish to minimise travelling distances, and to facilitate a potential future social housing scheme on part of the existing allotment site.

Section 4: Housing

4.2. Housing Mix

Policy HOUS1 provides for housing mix across the county and the Town Council supports this approach. However, it also requests that policy SHM of the SLP is also retained as a necessary defence against new-build second homes in Swanage.

HOUS2: Affordable housing

The Town Council supports the percentage of affordable housing in new development set out in Policy HOUS2. Although 35 per cent represents a reduction on rates within the Purbeck Local Plan, it is hoped that this can be robustly enforced as it has been subject to viability testing.

It is noted that in the Swanage Introduction, point 13.1.1., there is no mention of younger people or social housing. Swanage needs more genuinely affordable housing for local people, to rent or buy, and that this must be included in the housing need strategy for the town.

The Town Council is actively working to establish a community-led housing project and would welcome a discussion with Dorset Council regarding the allocation of potential sites in the Dorset Local Plan for community-led social housing. The Council requests retention of the wording around the Prospect Allotment site, which was consulted upon as part of the Swanage Local Plan and carries a degree of public support (together with Policy SA, discussed below). The Town Council is extremely reluctant to lose the clear 'hook' for the development of affordable housing at this location (see paragraphs 172 to 177 of the Swanage Local Plan).

Section 4.7. Second homes

The Town Council believes that it is essential that the wording of Policy H14: Second Homes of the draft Purbeck Local Plan is retained and incorporated into Section 4.7. of the draft Dorset Local Plan.

This is of particular relevance to Swanage, and also many other villages and coastal areas in the county which have the appearance of 'ghost-towns'/'ghost-streets' in certain areas, e.g. Worth Matravers. Parts of Swanage have been subject to flat development and have no permanent residents living in them at all, many others have less than 50% permanent residents.

It is felt that the negative impacts of second homes start to outweigh the positive impacts when the proportion of second homes crosses a certain threshold, e.g. Swanage is noted as 17.8%, although this figure is somewhat historic and could potentially be a lot higher as noted in the Purbeck District Council Parish Housing Needs Survey Report for Swanage April 2016, whereby holiday lets pay Business Rates and not Council Tax and are therefore not included in the figure of 17%. Details of the methodology used is not provided by Dorset Council, and a question is raised by the Town Council as to whether this figure has been incorrectly reported and should actually be noted as 19%?

Although the Town Council recognises that second home ownership does bring some economic benefits (e.g. to the local building maintenance sector), the detrimental effect on local communities has been noted in the area, as follows:

- Increasing property prices continue to attract the interest of speculative buyers.
- Closure of previously long-standing businesses, including pubs and small convenience type shops/post offices.
- Local groups/clubs have suffered with dwindling membership numbers, e.g. local Chamber of Trade and the Purbeck Society, and some have even disbanded e.g. the longstanding Swanage Lions Club.
- Limited renting/purchasing opportunities for local residents on low incomes - increased house prices and premium rents seen, and a large number of properties are only available for 'seasonal' short-term renting.
- Concerns regarding more vulnerable residents e.g. the elderly, being left somewhat 'isolated' in these areas/developments.
- Not considered to be an efficient use of a scarce resource. Given that the area cannot supply all housing to meet demand, then we have to consider a restriction on that demand.

An error has been noted in the draft Dorset Local Plan document – the second homes figure for Swanage has been quoted as 1% instead of 17.8%.

Section 4.11. Gypsies, Travellers and travelling showpeople

The Town Council objects strongly to the proposed Washpond Lane site as a large portion of the site is inappropriate for this development as it is subject to flooding (please refer to the Environment Agency Flood Map for Swanage, Flood Zone 3). The site was previously rejected for this use following a Dorset wide public consultation which ran from November 2011 to Feb 2012. Please see [Dorset Consultation Final Report of Issues and Options Consultation 2011-12](#), page 46 refers.

Also, in view of the location of the site, the Town Council does not believe that it would be best for gypsy and traveller communities because it would be isolating for them.

Were the site to be developed in any way the Town Council believes it should be for a community use.

This site was previously rejected for all of the above reasons and the Town Council is surprised to find that it has been put forward again. The Town Council would also wish it to be noted that details of this proposal were not included within the Swanage Section of the DLP, which is where the Council would have expected to find it in the interests of transparency.

Section 6: Community Infrastructure

Policy COM4

Swanage Town Council welcomes the countywide protection of public open spaces. However, it once again requests that the additional local protection provided by the Swanage Local Plan, in Policy OSR, should be retained.

Section 6.7. Transport network

The Town Council supports Dorset Council's policy to reduce traffic impacts and again reiterates its concerns regarding the A351 which already suffers regular instances of acute traffic congestion and gridlock, and the environmental impact of this.

In recent years sizeable sums of money have been spent on the onward rail connection of the Swanage Railway to Wareham from its current passenger-carrying terminus at Norden. The Town Council is disappointed to note that there is no mention of continuing Dorset Council support for this important project in the draft Dorset Local Plan, which fits in with Dorset Council's aims of sustainability of transport modes and sustainable tourism.

Consultation process

Major concerns are held by the Town Council regarding the timing of such an important consultation, during a national lockdown period, and its shortcomings e.g. website functionality/navigation. The Town Council raises the question as to whether this complies with best practice on consultation.

Further concerns are held regarding the timescale of this consultation, and Dorset Council's inconsistent approach to consultations. In this respect attention is drawn to the recent public consultation on dogs in public spaces, which was extended from 12 to 15 weeks because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dorset Council is aware of the poor broadband/connection difficulties experienced in parts of the county, and it has been recognised by the Council in the DLP that there is a sizeable aged population in Swanage, and Dorset as a whole, a proportion of whom struggle with online services.

Comments are made that any references to policies regarding Swanage in the main body of the draft Dorset Local Plan should either also be included in the Swanage Section of the Plan, or at least have a link from the Swanage Section through to the main Plan as it was difficult to link relevance of policies to Swanage.

A sizeable number of concerns/questions have also been received from local residents including:

- That the consultation is being undertaken during a national lockdown period.
- A large proportion of the local community had been unaware that the consultation was taking place.
- Leaflet drops have been undertaken in some areas by local residents themselves to make more people aware, which had created some confusion amongst residents, many of whom contacted or submitted their emails/letters/responses to the Town Council instead of Dorset Council.
- The Dorset Council website is difficult to navigate and 'off-putting' to some residents, issues also experienced with functionality of the website when trying to find information within the consultation documents, and when trying to complete the online questionnaire.
- Concerns regarding the limited public consultation that has taken place in Swanage.
- The consultation documents are sizeable and a paper copy of the plan is only available from Swanage Library, a fact which many residents were unaware of.
- In view of the above limitations, a recommendation is made that Dorset Council should consider extending the timescale for the consultation to give residents more time to overcome these issues, or consider delaying the consultation to later in the year when face to face consultation could be undertaken.

Prepared by:

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March 2020

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