

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

NEWS RELEASE 15 July 2016

Local plan review - opportunity to comment on proposals

- Opportunity for comment ran until 16 September -

New Forest District Council is reviewing its Local Plan and inviting people to comment.

At their (11 July 2016) Council meeting, Members of New Forest District Council agreed the papers that will form the first part of public consultation on the local plan, from 15 July until 16 September.

The Local Plan is the document which shapes and directs development in the area, is being reviewed because of significant changes to national planning policy intended to increase house-building. New evidence suggests there is a need for 600-700 homes to be provided annually for the New Forest district (the area around the outside of the National Park) compared to our current target of 200 homes.

Councillor Edward Heron, deputy leader of New Forest District Council, said: "Our aim is to have a robust and sensible Local Plan that balances the needs for housing with the sensitivities of the area. This will be a transparent process open to public comment with feedback encouraged. At this stage we are asking people to give us their views on the sites which initially have been identified as suitable for possible future development.

"We are facing difficult choices for our area and with our revised Local Plan we are aiming to balance the pressing need for homes in the area with the desire to protect the environment. If we are to get close to meeting the need for new homes, we may have to consider development within the Green Belt as well as in other parts of the countryside around our towns and villages. This has been done in other areas similar to ours with limited scope for future development, and we want to hear what the public think about this.

He continued: "By taking a positive approach to meeting the government's target, we can ensure that new developments contribute to the vitality of our communities. We need to address the urgent need for affordable homes for younger people and families, and meet at least some of the housing need where it arises; in the south of the district, this will mean building on some Green Belt land.

"No decisions have yet been taken on where future development will be, but we are asking for comments from the public on possible proposals. Any land that goes forward to the next stage for development will be subject to further consultation and a public hearing chaired by an independent planning inspector."

The nine week opportunity for comment on the draft document starts on 15 July at www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016.

For people unable to view this on line at home, they can access them online at any NFDC office or library, or attend any of the three information drop-in events: The drop-in events will all be held at Totton & Eling Community Centre on Monday 25 July, at Fordingbridge, Avonway Centre on Tuesday 26 July, and at The Lymington (Community) Centre on Wednesday 27 July from 4:00pm to 7:30pm. These events are open to everyone and will cover the plan for the whole district, not just the locality of the event.

Local Plan?

All local authorities with planning powers are required to prepare a Local Plan - the document which shapes and directs development in the area. Development must meet the requirements in the plan and the council's planning officers work with developers so that new buildings and facilities are done in a way that is right for each location.

Why is NFDC's Local Plan changing?

A review of the plan is being done now as central government has changed national planning policy. Nationally, it is estimated that around 250,000 new homes per year need to be built, and the government expects all areas to plan to address their own housing needs..

The current local plan has a strategy of 'development restraint', and is no longer fully compliant with national planning policy, specifically on the need to increase housing supply. Our housing need is driven by an estimated 22,000 population increase between 2016-2036. All of this projected growth is in the 65+ age groups, and the working age population is expected to decline by 2,200. The main contributor to this is internal migration within the UK e.g. for retirement.

NFDC's housing need is at least 600 new homes each year, for twenty years, compared to our current target of 200.

Why are more homes needed?

Demand for housing is growing nationally, with an increase in the population and people living longer, and that is echoed in the New Forest district area which is also a popular place to move to.

The type of housing required is changing – with growing demand for more homes for single people, homes suitable for the retired and elderly, and homes that are affordable.

How have the potential sites for development been chosen?

NFDC planning officers have identified potential new sites for development in a process which has considered every pocket of undeveloped land in the district. This process assessed each site under criteria that determines if the land is considered 'sustainable' as a development site.

A site is assessed for suitability by considering the social, economic, and environmental benefits and consequences that developing the site would bring.

The Council knows there is not enough 'brownfield' land to meet future development needs so has to find locations on the edges of our towns and villages which might be suitable for development.

There are various constraints on some of the land in the area which rules it out for development, for example, protected nature conservation sites, and land that is liable to flood.

With the supply of potentially suitable development land is so limited we have looked for possible opportunities in the Green Belt. Some of our most sustainable locations for potential development are in the Green Belt

What is meant by green field sites and Green Belt sites?

When land is referred to as a 'green field site' this means it is land in the countryside that hasn't previously been developed, usually beyond the boundary of a town or village.

Sometimes this 'countryside' land is subject to environmental designations to protect it from development because of its natural beauty or importance to wildlife.

Green Belts are a policy designation designed to prevent urban sprawl, and the land is designated 'Green Belt' because of its location around the urban area it is designed to stop 'sprawling' rather than because of the land's natural beauty or intrinsic quality.

The most attractive countryside is not necessarily that designated as Green Belt. In New Forest District the area south of Ringwood through to Lymington is designated Green Belt. The countryside in the Avon Valley and Downlands area north of Ringwood and in Totton and the Waterside is not Green Belt land, although much of it is still attractive countryside and some of it is subject to other national designations which recognise its landscape or nature conservation importance and value.

NFDC is following government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF). We can only consider releasing land for development from the Green Belt in very special circumstances, and where the benefits of the development outweigh the loss of some Green Belt land

The Council's search for suitable sites for future development has concluded that sites within the Green Belt need to be seriously considered as there is not enough land outside of the Green Belt to meet identified needs.

What will this mean for development in the local area?

NFDC aims to prepare a Local Plan that strikes the right balance between meeting our housing needs and protecting existing communities and sensitive areas. The only way we can retain control over development is to prepare a Local Plan.

How do people find out more and comment ?

From 15 July 2016 the draft Local Plan can be viewed at newforest.gov.uk/localplan2016

The cabinet report will be on newforest.gov.uk (council and democracy section) the evening of 28 June

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