

31 March 2016
L31 03 16 Sarah Loch.docx

Sarah Loch
Chair of Blandford +
The Town Clerk's Office
Church Street
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 7AD

By Post and E.mail

Dear Sarah

Representations on behalf of the Davis and Coats families in respect of the Blandford+ Pre Submission Neighbourhood Plan 2015 - 2031

I write with regard to the above. My clients welcome the positive attitude adopted in the Plan to potential development to the north and east of the town, on land in my clients' control. As landowners, my clients give whole-hearted support to Policy 1, which facilitates this. As you know, my clients have been promoting this land since the beginning of the decade and of recent times have worked with your team to provide background evidence to support the proposals in your emerging Plan. With landowner support and background planning work having been undertaken, delivery of the proposals can come forward all the quicker.

The background work undertaken in respect of access, ecology, landscape, flood risk & drainage and infrastructure delivery all indicate there are no substantive barriers to the development in principle.

It is noted that Policy 1 advocates submission of a comprehensive outline planning application for the whole site. Once again, my clients welcome this, as their proposals for housing, employment uses, household recycling centre, primary school, relocated allotments and community facilities need to be considered as a comprehensive package, due to viability, because of the differing land values and infrastructure costs involved.

The Neighbourhood Plan with its proposals for additional housing, particularly circa 400 on my clients' land, are particularly well-timed, bearing in mind the publication of the Eastern Dorset Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the Inspector's comments on the North District Local at the end of last year.

The SHMA revealed housing needs in North Dorset and the whole housing market are considerably greater than catered for in Dorset local plans, and housing completions in North Dorset have fallen. See below:

Local Plan Housing Target	Full Objectively Assessed Need
285 homes per annum (2011 – 2031)	330 homes per annum (2013 – 2033)
Housing Completions (net)	
2013/14	2014/15
228 dwellings	178 dwellings

Strategic Cross Boundary Planning Issues in Dorset – March 2016

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In assessing whether the North Dorset Local Plan was sound, the Inspector commented in paragraph 15 of his report that:

In order to ensure the Council is promoting the most appropriate strategy, which is consistent with national policy, then a commitment to an early review of LP1 (in conjunction with the preparation of LP2) is required.

The Council acceded to an early review, commencing by the end of March 2016, with anticipated adoption by the end of November 2018.

With housing need greater than LP1 catered for and housing completions declining, there is an urgent need to bring forward housing development as early as possible. There is no reason why the Neighbourhood Plan should not be a vehicle for helping achieve this.

Whilst there is not the same requirement for a neighbourhood plan to be found 'sound', it does have to be 'in *general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan*', in this case the North Dorset Local Plan. The Local Plan states in para 44 that:

A neighbourhood plan for one of the four main towns will have to generally conform with the proposals for the growth of that town, as set out in the Local Plan part 1.

It is notable that the original wording was 'accord with' and this was modified to 'generally conform with' to reflect government planning guidance, which is more flexible.

In respect of the Local Plan, there is much which these proposals conform with

It is also noteworthy that the Local Plan states para 3.45 that:

'A neighbourhood plan for one of the four main towns can allow greater levels of growth (by allocating additional sites for development) ...' (My underlining)

In respect Blandford specifically, para 8.11 lists two key spatial aspects of strategy (inter alia):

- *Focusing housing in accessible locations, particularly locations close to the town centre and other facilities; and*
- *Locating mainly B Class employment uses on the northern edge of the town in locations accessible to the strategic road network;*

The Masterplan that accompanies the proposals has taken these issues on board.

Paragraph 8.12 states:

The strategy for the town will see the building out of sites already allocated for development or with planning permission in the early part of the plan period, with additional greenfield sites beyond the bypass being brought forward after that date... (My underlining) The words 'beyond the bypass' were requested as a modification by the Inspector, following representations at the Examination.

Paragraph 8.13 states:

..three local councils are working together, under the name of Blandford +, to produce a neighbourhood plan. This will deal with non-strategic matters to supplement the policies contained in this Local Plan, which can include greenfield sites beyond the bypass. (My underlining)

Once again the 'beyond the bypass' was inserted, as suggested by the Inspector, following representations by both Blandford + and Savills at the Examination.

In para 8.23, the Local Plan lists 3 options for further growth, taking account of landscape constraints. One of these options is land to the north east of Blandford Forum beyond the bypass, outside ... the AONB. The capacity is given as 800, which is a figure the Council came up, with not Blandford + or Savills.

Whilst land to the north east was not supported, para 8.25 states:

*Specific sites to take forward housing growth in Blandford will be identified in the Local Plan Part 2...
Further sites may come forward through the preparation of neighbourhood plans. (My underlining)*

In summary in respect of housing, there is a housing crisis both nationally and locally which needs addressing urgently. Whilst, this site was not allocated in the Local Plan, the Inspector and subsequently the Council made changes to the Plan which are sympathetic to its future delivery. It is noteworthy also that the planning officer representing the Council at the Examination conceded that this site was likely to come forward in the next local plan.

To some extent Blandford + have picked up the baton from the Inspector examining the Local Plan, and have commendably adapted their position of promoting an alternative housing strategy through the Local Plan process, to enshrining their desired mixed-use expansion of the town in Policy 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

We should not forget that Policy 1 not only includes circa 400 dwellings, but also a site for a household recycling centre and a new primary school. It is noted Dorset County Council support these proposals having had great difficulty finding suitable sites. It is noteworthy that although on the north side of the bypass the school is located adjacent to an existing footbridge giving direct access to residential development on the south side of the bypass. An employment site is proposed adjacent to the household recycling centre, prompted by a search by a local industrialist who has been given positive feedback by the Council to his proposals. Both the recycling centre and the employment site are adjacent to Sunrise Business Park. Following representations at the Local Plan examination, the Inspector altered the wording of Policy 30 of the Local Plan which now reads:

The retention and small scale expansion of existing employment sites..... in the countryside for employment purposes will be encouraged

The policy is subject to standard criteria. The employment proposals could be said to accord with this policy, being tantamount to an extension of the Sunrise Business Park.

Policy 1 also promotes the relocation of the existing allotments to promote safe access to the school. Community facilities are also promoted for the benefit of residents of Blandford.

All in all, this a worthy mixed use proposal, which caters for the expressed needs of an expanding town, providing much needed housing, employment and local facilities in a sustainable fashion. The Davis and Coats families give their full support to Policy 1, commend it to others and if adopted, the families would work with development partners to ensure the early delivery of these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Cliff Lane
Director