

Blandford+ Neighbourhood Plan

The councils of Bryanston, Blandford St Mary and Blandford Forum have been working together, since 2018, to produce the Blandford+ Neighbourhood Plan (B+NP) Version 2.

Introduction

1. What is a Neighbourhood Plan and why is it important?

Under the Localism Act 2011, communities, like ours, can produce a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) to have a real say (through policies) in the future of the places where we live and work, and the legal weight to decide planning matters, alongside the Dorset Council's Local Plan.

2. What will our Neighbourhood Plan deliver?

- A new two-form entry primary school
- A community hall with health-related activities in the North of Blandford
- A community hall in Blandford St Mary
- Prevent change of use of the Bryanston Club
- Additional health and well-being provision
- Protection against future speculative development on important open green spaces
- Protection of the conservation areas and green spaces in the three parishes
- A total of 15 policies to protect and develop Blandford Forum, Blandford St Mary and Bryanston through a plan-led approach

3. What legal status will our Neighbourhood Plan have?

The NP passed both statutory consultations (known as Regulation 14 and Regulation 16) and passed examination in February 2020. On 12th March this year, the Dorset Council issued a Decision Statement to say that the B+ NP could proceed to a Public Referendum on 6th May 2021. If there is a vote above 50% in favour, the NP will become statutory.

4. **What happens on 6th May 2021?**

The Public Referendum will be held on Thursday 6th May 2021 between 7am and 10pm. At your local polling station, or by postal vote, you will be able to cast your vote for the B+ NP and on the ballot paper, you will be asked to answer **yes** or **no** to just ONE question:

“Do you want Dorset Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Blandford+ to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?”

Once the NP has received over 50% in favour, it then becomes a statutory document that will be used to help decide planning matters in the Blandford Forum, Blandford St Mary and Bryanston area, alongside the Dorset Council Local Plan. There will be 15 legal policies in all to help protect and to guide the future development of the B+ area.

NB: On the same day you will also have the opportunity to vote for a Police and Crime Commissioner.

5. **Why was the NP started?**

Following the Localism Act of 2011, the three councils decided together that it would be very worthwhile for the Blandford area to have an NP area, so that the local community would have a greater say in local matters. A steering group was formed comprising councillors from the three parishes.

Early public consultations recognised and supported the need for:

- a new school and community centre in the North of Blandford
- expansion of local health facilities
- protection for important green spaces like the Deer Park/Crown Meadows and Stour Meadows
- protection for the conservation areas of the three parishes
- more rented accommodation
- a new community hall for Blandford St Mary
- improvements at the Bryanston Club

From these early consultations, a draft plan was devised incorporating these local wishes. From the word go our NP has been driven by infrastructure needs and not by housing development but we recognised that in order to have the infrastructure, like a new school and community hall, some development would need to happen. Working with advisors and the then North Dorset District Council planning department, we devised options for growth. These were displayed at public meetings in the three parishes. Although other options for growth were outlined, 76% of local respondents said they supported development to the North and East of the town.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(please see relevant headings for each B+ council area)

Blandford Forum

1. Why do we need a new school?

Dorset Council's Education Department have explicitly stated that a new school is urgently required as it is already having to cope with excess demand for school places in the Blandford+ area and is dealing with this over capacity through temporary classrooms in some schools. This is not sustainable or best for our children in the longer term, nor is it feasible to extend into the grounds or expand current Primary School buildings any further.

2. Why does the school have to go North of the bypass in that space causing the allotments to move?

Dorset Council's Education Department confirmed in their pupil planning statement of 2019 that the best site for the new school, both in terms of serving the current need for at least a one-form entry primary school in the northern part of the town and in terms of easing traffic congestion, would be North of the bypass in the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and close to the infrastructure that will link it to Northern Blandford (making use of the yellow bridge). This was the site chosen by Dorset Council's Education Department as the most viable and meets the test of exceptional circumstances, to build in the AONB, and to meet the urgent need which is projected to

increase in the northern part of Blandford. In the selection process, all other options for expansion of existing schools in the area were considered by Dorset Council's Education Department but none met the test of long-term viability.

The school meets the test of exceptional circumstances, to build in the AONB as planning permission would rightly not be given for housing or a new community hall in the AONB. This is why it is necessary and unavoidable for the allotments to move. Large structures like the new community hall and a small row of shops plus some of the 400 houses can only go where the allotments are now. In the main development on the eastern side of the bypass, such buildings would take up a lot of space and be very prominent in the landscape, which is in sight of the AONB.

The allotments will be situated in the AONB, along with the new school as they will have a very low profile on the AONB ridge and provide a 'soft edge' to the AONB.

Allotments also increase biodiversity and are sustainable for as long as people need allotments.

Placing the school, allotments and a green recreation space in this area, will prevent any further encroachments or building in the AONB.

Blandford Forum Town Council is committed to negotiating the best possible outcome for the allotments and the plot holders and has appointed qualified experts for this purpose.

3. Why can't the school be built first?

Part of the funding for the school comes from contributions from the developer (the rest comes from the Dorset Council and Department for Education). They have to build some houses before the contributions can be collected. A school is a very expensive piece of infrastructure.

4. Will the school/new development meet the latest climate change demands?

The site and all building criteria applied will be subject to latest Government directives and the National Planning Policy Framework regarding climate change.

In particular, Policy B2 in the Neighbourhood Plan sets out requirements for a design and landscape scheme that will mitigate adverse impacts on the AONB. It also sets out requirements for a green infrastructure strategy that will protect and enhance environmental assets and deliver, where possible, a gain in biodiversity for the site. This includes:

- Managing the risks of water flooding in the new development, incorporating source control and sustainable drainage techniques.
- Extensive tree planting and landscaping, provision of open green spaces.
- Increasing school place capacity in the North of the town to reduce the need for children to travel by car.
- Encouraging all new building in and around Blandford to be as low energy as possible.

5. We don't need more houses, there are too many around Blandford area already - why are you proposing to build more North/North East of Blandford (Policy B2)?

Development will go ahead because of the housing numbers that have been set by Central Government. The Neighbourhood Plan offers a plan led approach so that we have a greater say, by law, in the way the Blandford area will develop.

The Neighbourhood Plan development of 400 houses is the only one that offers a two-form entry primary school; a community centre with health-related facilities; more recreation space and the possibility of a small convenience store and cafe in the North Eastern part of the town.

Blandford Forum is one of the principal towns in Central Dorset and the main service centre for a large number of surrounding villages and rural areas. Work on the Dorset Council Local Plan has made it

clear that Blandford Forum, with Blandford St. Mary and Bryanston, as a tier two settlement, will continue to be the focus for growth for the majority of housing, employment and infrastructure in the area.

Therefore, development will go ahead. Dorset does not currently have a 5-year Housing Land Supply, leaving the whole county and Blandford vulnerable to speculative and unregulated development.

Blandford+ recognises that Blandford must grow to meet the needs of the area and have worked closely with the Dorset Council to understand what the future growth in Blandford will be. Having a NP in place will give the three councils a much greater say in where future development should go; what's to be built and what we get in return!

As part of this process a thorough review of all the available land in and around Blandford was carried out by AECOM (2018/19), an independent body, appointed by Ministry of Communities Housing and Local Government (MCHLG). They concluded that the best and most sustainable option for Blandford for delivery of both the school and houses was the land to the North and East outside the by-pass.

6. How was this site actually chosen?

An independent and thorough review, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), of all the available land was commissioned through Central Government. This review was used to identify the best and most sustainable option for Blandford to deliver the vital infrastructure needed and the houses to support this and concluded this to be land outside the by-pass to the North and North East of Blandford.

The SEA considered all the factors below:

- Biodiversity
- Fauna
- Water
- Material assets
- Population
- Flora
- Air
- Human health
- Soil
- Landscape
- Climate factors
- Cultural, architectural and archaeological heritage

7. I live in Preetz Way - I don't want to look out at 400 more houses. Why can't they be built somewhere else?

Given that Blandford is surrounded by open farmland and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the SEA acknowledged that wherever new development is sited, it will have an impact on its surroundings and on its neighbours. It reviewed all available land options and concluded that, by using appropriate mitigation criteria such as sensitive building design, landscaping and mature planting, developing to the North and East of Blandford would have the least impact of all the potential development options. Hopefully, the view from Preetz Way looking east will not be too affected.

8. Why are you taking perfectly good farmland over the by-pass and putting houses on it?

Blandford is surrounded by farmland and by Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are not enough brown field sites or areas of undeveloped land within the Blandford+ area (or Dorset) to meet the housing numbers allocated for the Blandford area. Future development must therefore extend beyond the by-pass and onto greenfield land / farmland. This longer-term strategy was detailed in the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016) supporting text:

*"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.**"*

9. What could happen if houses are not built North/North East of Blandford?

If the new homes are not built North/North East of the town, pockets of new houses will be built all over the area, without the infrastructure and, as Blandford is surrounded by AONB land, undoubtedly at less desirable sites.

10. We don't have enough doctors' surgeries now.

Blandford+ have been working with the Dorset Care Commissioning Group, the Dorset Council and the Blandford Group Practice to gather

the evidence required to ensure that contributions from the developer will be collected and used to expand GP services, including at the Community Hospital, and health and well-being facilities in Blandford.

11. Our roads won't cope with the influx of additional traffic.

Siting new development to the North and East of Blandford would allow direct access to and from the by-pass and would enable the traffic to flow without clogging up the town centre. Siting the new school within this development would also reduce school traffic through the town centre as children from the north of the town will be able to access the new school easily and safely either by road or on foot by finally bringing into use the yellow bridge over the by-pass.

12. The by-pass will become grid-locked with traffic - especially with new roundabout, slowing up traffic even more.

It is essential that any new development is supported by the appropriate highway infrastructure. Dorset Highways have been consulted throughout, and Blandford+ believe that with appropriate traffic management systems in place, disruption to traffic flow on the by-pass can be minimised and may even be improved by maintaining a constant but more controlled speed.

We believe that the road infrastructure to the South and East of Blandford will not support future development beyond that already proposed in the NDDC Local Plan Part 1 (2016) and by the Dorset Council in the Dorset Council Draft Plan (2021). Siting new development to the North of the town and outside the by-pass will make best use of the road infrastructure already in place and will potentially reduce the peak time traffic flow through the town centre as school traffic from the northern parts of the town will no longer need to access the schools to the south.

13. How will links back to the town be made?

Policy B2 within the NP (Land to the North & East of Blandford) sets out that the highways scheme must encourage and enable safe and convenient walking and cycling to community facilities such as:

- The new community centre, part of the proposed development

- The new school (making use of the yellow bridge, currently a 'bridge to nowhere') and The Blandford School
- The recreation grounds at Larksmead and Pimperne Brook
- Employment areas (including the town centre, Sunrise Business Park, Glenmore Industrial Estate, and Blandford Heights Industrial Estate)

The highways scheme also includes plans for the improvement to the existing bus services to serve the proposals and connecting to the town centre, The Blandford School, the Sunrise Business Park, Glenmore Industrial Estate and Blandford Heights Industrial Estate.

The NP also designates a 'Green Infrastructure Network' to promote sustainable movement and ecological connectivity through the town and neighbouring parishes. The Network comprises Local Green Spaces, informal open spaces, allotments, playing fields, off-street footpaths/cycleways, children's play areas, woodland and land of biodiversity value.

14. What community facilities will there be on the new estate?

As well as the new primary school and playing area, proposals for the new development include a community 'hub' comprising a community centre, which will also be used as new health and well-being facility. Additionally, there are plans for a building with three outlets, which could include a convenience store and café. There will be new allotments and associated facilities, formal and informal recreation areas, footpaths and cycleways linking into the Green Infrastructure Network and into town, and a new landscaped lake area overlooking Pimperne Brook.

15. We need to be planting a lot more trees - how does the new development do this?

To ensure a longer term, sustainable approach the developer would be offering strategic planting such as trees and hedges for screening, as part of the developments. As well as a significant planting schedule, the site would also include formal and informal open green spaces / recreational areas, a green pathway infrastructure and a landscaped lake area. A key requirement of the NP is to protect and

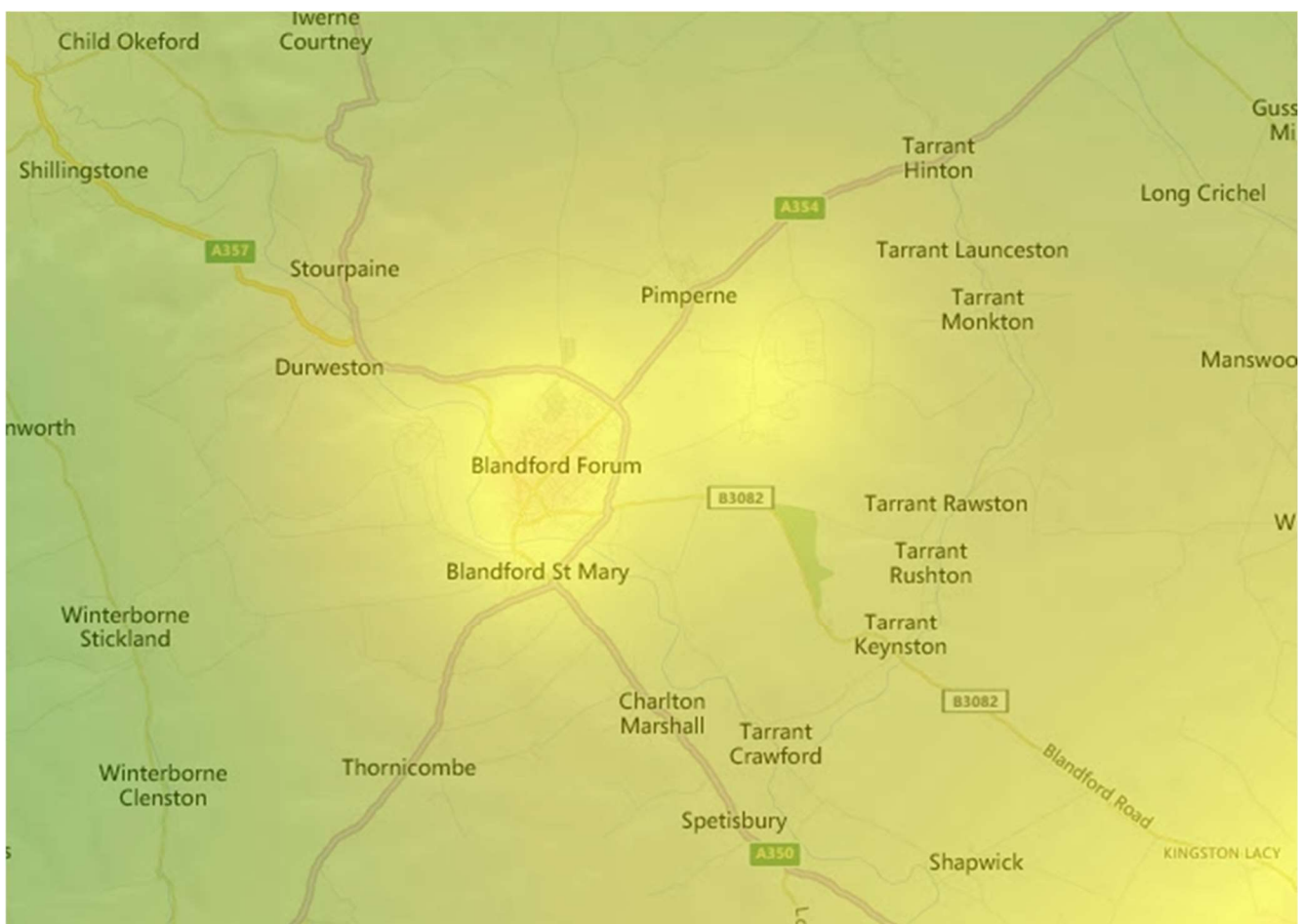
enhance the environmental assets of the site and wherever possible, to increase its biodiversity. There will be more trees after the development than before.

16. Will there be enough charging points on the new estate for all the electric cars we're going to get?

The developer has confirmed that there will be electric car charging points in each garage and provisions will be made in shared spaces.

17. Won't this affect the AONB's dark sky status?

The proposed new development lies between Blandford Forum, Blandford Camp and Pimperne. Given that the development is already surrounded by sources of 'light pollution' (see below), it is not foreseen that the additional light given off will impact on the overall AONB Dark Sky status. The most up to date street lighting will also be able to help mitigate light spillage.



Blandford

Zenith sky brightness info (2015)

Coordinates	50.86812, -2.15495
SQM	20.87 mag./arc sec ²
Brightness	0.485 mcd/m ²
Artif. bright.	314 μ cd/m ²
Ratio	1.84
Bortle	class 4
Elevation	81 meters

Blandford Camp

Zenith sky brightness info (2015)

Coordinates	50.87397, -2.11684
SQM	20.91 mag./arc sec ²
Brightness	0.465 mcd/m ²
Artif. bright.	294 μ cd/m ²
Ratio	1.72
Bortle	class 4
Elevation	79 meters

Pimperne

Zenith sky brightness info (2015)

Coordinates	50.88069, -2.13641
SQM	21.16 mag./arc sec ²
Brightness	0.369 mcd/m ²
Artif. bright.	198 μ cd/m ²
Ratio	1.16
Bortle	class 4
Elevation	56 meters

18. Will the Neighbourhood Plan protect our open spaces from development?

The NP has compiled a list of our green spaces (Policy B10) and designated them as Local Green Spaces. This designation is like 'green belt' and resists development that will undermine the character of these important areas.

In addition, a specific policy (B14) sets out protection for the Stour Meadows (including the area known as the Crown Meadows) to sustain the character of the area and prevent unwanted development.

Bryanston

1. Specifically, why is the Neighbourhood Plan important to Bryanston?

Apart from Blandford Forum being the important hub for the area, the NP offers two vital protections for the parish of Bryanston:

- Development will not be allowed unless a need has been established in exceptional circumstances, e.g. for farm workers (*The development at Lower Bryanston Farm, which has already been given the first stage of planning permission, is not included in this).
- Any new dwellings (in exceptional circumstances), extensions and other material alterations will be expected to meet the Design Code for Bryanston, as set out in Policy B13
- Protection for Bryanston Club from change of use.

Blandford St Mary

With its close geographical links to the town the NP policies also apply to Blandford St. Mary.

1. What happens if the NP fails referendum?

The 15 policies in the NP will not become law and will have no weight in planning decisions. Development will occur but there will be no protection against speculative development. Areas that the NP will protect – Lower Bryanston, the conservation areas, Deer Park/Crown Meadows and the town centre will be subject to planning applications that the three Councils will not be able to resist.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information, including the full Neighbourhood Plan, can be found on <https://blandfordplus.org.uk>