

**NORTH DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**HILL FORTS WARD**  
**REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS**  
**September 2017**

Cllr Sherry Jespersen: [s.jespersen@btinternet.com](mailto:s.jespersen@btinternet.com)  
Cllr Piers Brown: [padbrown@icloud.com](mailto:padbrown@icloud.com)  
Cllr Deborah Croney: [dcroney@north-dorset.gov.uk](mailto:dcroney@north-dorset.gov.uk)

**Local Government Reorganisation**

Central Government has still not given us the now long overdue response to our application to form two unitary Councils for Dorset. This delay and uncertainty is not helpful in terms of delivering reorganisation with the timescale to be up and running by April 2019. We are constrained as to how much preparatory work we can do in advance of the response from Government but we are doing all that we can. Over the summer the Councils have established two Joint Committees to drive forward the high level, strategic planning for reorganisation. Sherry will be one of two Councillors representing North Dorset on the Dorset Joint Committee and Deborah is one of the County Council representatives on the Joint Committee for the conurbation.

It is increasingly clear that our local councils must be restructured in order to be able to continue to provide services, so even if the unitary proposition does not receive support from Westminster, reorganisation in one form or another is the only option for a viable future.

**Development and Planning**

As has been widely reported, NDCC has announced that it can no longer guarantee to deliver the number of houses required over the coming 5 years. This is known, in planning speak, as the loss of the Five Year Housing Land Supply. This has come about because, for a number of reasons entirely outside the control of the Council, developers have failed to build the houses which have been given planning permission or are in the spatial strategy in our Local Plan.

One of the functions of a Local Plan is to allocate sites to meet the objectively assessed housing need. If, for whatever reason, this housing is not delivered, the Local Plan is deemed to have failed under the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and paragraph 14 of the NPPF is triggered. This paragraph defines a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” which require that decision makers should look to grant permission unless “any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”. This is the so called weighted or tilted balance which fundamentally alters the weight to be given to policies in our Local Plan as against the presumption in favour.

This does not mean that all applications will be permitted. Policies in the NPPF and our own Local Plan relating to SSSIs; Local Green Spaces; AONBs; flooding and heritage assets, including listed buildings and conservation areas, remain in force. And other policies are not set aside, but they now have to meet the higher criteria of significantly and demonstrably outweighing the benefit of the proposed development. Settlement boundaries alone, for example, are now unlikely to carry sufficient weight to refuse a development.

#### What does this mean for Parish Councils?

Our advice to Parish Councils is to continue to comment on applications using the same policies and criteria you have always used. If you wish to support or object to a development under a policy in the Local Plan, do so. It will then be for NDDC, as the decision maker, to determine what weight can be given to these policies under the new “tilted weighting” regime.

Shillingstone’s Neighbourhood Plan is now part of the Local Plan and will carry the same weighting as other policies. The designated Local Green Space will remain protected. Iwerne Minster and Pimperne should continue to work towards their NPs, the current position with regard to the 5YHLS will not last forever and the NPs are a long term gain.

#### What can NDDC do about the situation?

The only thing which can regain the 5YHLS is for the developers to build the required houses. NDDC is doing what it can to facilitate this including trying to bring forward some of the major schemes in the Local Plan Spatial Strategy, particularly in Gillingham. We have a dedicated Major Projects Team working with developers and we have secured £238,000 of government funding for Community Led Housing initiatives. The fact remains, however, that this situation has arisen because of conditions in the housing industry, both local and national, and there is little which we can do to change this in the short term.

#### **Register to Vote**

The annual audit for the Register of Electors is currently underway and NDDC is writing to all residents in order to check who is eligible to vote and ensure that the information held on the Register is correct.

We are running a £1000 prize draw to encourage residents to respond electronically, online or by text. This is money well spent because last year the shift to electronic responses to this annual survey saved the council £27,000 in administration costs.

#### **Single Person Discount Review**

NDDC is carrying out a review of all council tax payers claiming a 25 percent single person discount on their council tax bill. The review involves the council working with Capita Local Government Services who will use data supplied from credit reference agencies to check against those currently receiving a discount.

NDDC is keen to ensure that everyone who is entitled to the Single Person discount receives it. However, we recognise that tax payers who claim the discount improperly place an unnecessary burden on other residents and reduce the council tax funding available to pay for services.

### **Funding to Help North Dorset Businesses.**

NDDC can support local start-up businesses with grants of up to £4000 from its Economic Growth Fund. Application is simple and includes advice from our Economic Development Officers on other possible sources of support and funding. Details can be found at [dorsetforyou.gov.uk/north-dorset-economic-growth-fund](http://dorsetforyou.gov.uk/north-dorset-economic-growth-fund).

We also have grants to help local businesses, large and small, take on apprentices.

### **Blandford Town Centre Improvements**

NDDC has funding available to make improvements to Blandford town centre. The funds have come from developer contributions following the completion of the new Lidl supermarket in the town. Funds remaining from previous developments are also available.

The funding could be used for town centre enhancements or promotion projects; improvements to the market place or to shop fronts; retail opportunities or community resources. The Council, which manages the money, would like to take an overview of all the potential projects to make the best use of the funding and so is inviting local organisations and businesses to apply for funding.

### **Hambleton Division Meeting**

The next meeting will be on 6<sup>th</sup> October at 6.30pm, in Durweston village hall. The guest will be Simon Hoare MP. Open to all Parish Councils within the Hambleton Division, these meetings are opportunities to jointly discuss matters of interest and/or concern.