

Date: 27 October 2016



**Bryn MacGregor**  
**Clerk, Pimperne Parish Council**

**BY EMAIL ONLY**

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Dear Mr MacGregor

### **Pimperne Neighbourhood Plan Options Consultation**

Thank you for consulting Natural England on the Pimperne Neighbourhood Plan Options Consultation and apologies for the delay in our response.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

The Pimperne Neighbourhood Plan area lies within the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### **Comments relating to the Cranborne Chase AONB**

The Neighbourhood Plan area lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a designation of national importance with the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), all public bodies, local planning authorities and Natural England, have a duty to have regard to the statutory purpose of AONBs, which is the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area (Section 85 Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000). Local planning authorities are required to take such action as appears to them to be expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and amenity of an AONB to the extent that it lies within their area (Section 84(4) Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000).

In light of the very high level of protection afforded to AONBs Natural England recommends that the draft Landscape Character Policy includes an additional initial clause that states all new development within the plan area must not distract from the special qualities of the Cranborne Chase AONB and give the necessary weight to the Cranborne Chase AONB Management Plan policies.

### **Suitable locations for new development**

#### **Landscape considerations**

The draft plan provides for a significant increase in housing and the provision of new employment land on green field sites within the village of Pimperne. In order to ensure these proposed allocations do not harm the special qualities of the AONB, or conflict with the AONB policies set out in the North Dorset Local Plan, the proposed allocations should be subject to an appropriate landscape assessment that has been completed in full consultation with the Cranborne Chase AONB Team. Only sites considered to meet the high protection afforded to the AONB should be taken forward in the Neighbourhood Plan. Natural England would be happy to comment on the findings of landscape assessments in due course.

### **Biodiversity considerations**

The green field sites proposed for development should also be supported by a basic ecological assessment completed by a suitably qualified individual (phase 1 ecological survey extended to Phase 2 in cases where significant interests are found). The aim should be to ensure all allocated sites avoid significant wildlife interests and in particular any areas of unimproved or species rich semi improved grasslands. In order to fully inform the wider Neighbourhood Plan we also recommend that the plan development is supported by a Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) data search of the plan area.

In order to ensure all development in the plan area meets the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to enhance biodiversity Natural England recommends that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan includes a policy requiring all new development proposals on greenfield sites greater than 0.1 ha to be supported by a Biodiversity Mitigation Plan (BMP), that has been approved by the Dorset County Council Natural Environment Team (NET). The Biodiversity Mitigation Plan should be prepared by a suitably qualified individual and follow the standard format available on the Dorset For You website. The BMP should be used to secure measures to provide new nesting / roosting sites for bats, barn owls, swifts, etc. as well as any necessary measures for mitigating / compensating for adverse impacts on biodiversity interests.

### **Other considerations**

Your plan can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development. Examples might include:

- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.
- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies, or enhance provision. For example through the creation of a community orchard, new allotments, etc.
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see Planning Practice Guidance on this).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional native trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter please contact John Stobart on 07825 844475. For any new consultations or issues, please contact [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

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