

DRAFT RESPONSE TO PLANNING WHITE PAPER

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CONSULTATION ON GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Changes in the current planning system / White Paper: Planning for the future.

Response by Corfe Mullen Town Council

(Principal Authority: Dorset Council)

The planning system in England is developer led, imposed and top down already. The White Paper centralises the system even more and is obviously undemocratic. The proposals remove the right for local citizens and their democratically elected representatives at Town/Parish and Unitary level to influence how and where housing should be built. As a Town Council we would like to set up a Community Land Trust to provide some affordable housing for local people but most of the Green Belt around our town has been bought by developers.

We support the retention of Neighbourhood Plans, but they should fully reflect the aspirations of the local communities rather than being designed to meet arbitrary national objectives.

The delays in house building are not due to local councils but to market absorption and other factors identified in the Letwin review. Many areas of land in Dorset have planning permission but no houses have been built. Setting aside even more land for development, largely from so called protected areas, is not sustainable and does not make sense.

The zones of Growth, Renewal and Protection are simplistic. Corfe Mullen has no areas for growth or renewal and is surrounded by protected areas: heathland, SSSIs and Green Belt. Much of Dorset is like this but setting nationally binding housing targets as proposed takes no account of this.

In fact the White Paper purports to continue to protect Green Belt, but a brief examination of the small print reveals that this is not so. Green Belts can be redrawn and withdrawn to meet these national targets, which will require even more so-called protected areas to be concreted over.

The central control of house building ignores local need. Provision of housing should follow demonstrated need. The housing provided by developers is out of the reach of local people as Dorset's levels of pay are low. The developers will still charge high prices as long as there are people moving in from London and other places with even higher house prices, so providing more houses in Dorset will not bring prices down. Requiring developers to provide affordable houses on only larger sites will make the situation worse.

Furthermore, the replacement of the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements with a single levy is not going to generate sufficient funding for infrastructure and the affordable housing needed. We would support the ring fencing of funding for affordable housing.

Design improvement is always welcome but master planning needs to consider infrastructure and mitigation of impacts on habitats, flood risk, heritage and landscape. Climate change is the most important issue facing the world but there is little mention of new homes being built to the highest environmental standards without the need for retrofitting in the future. New

housing being built in Corfe Mullen at this moment is being built to our outdated building regulations and is far from being sustainable in the future.

Our road infrastructure is at capacity and if we are to protect the health of our community we cannot cope with an increase in housing and the cars they bring. Pollution levels on our main road which is C class are high now. Tree lined avenues sound lovely but all roads in Dorset are narrow and, with no motorways and very few dual carriageways, main roads are often gridlocked.

Developers would much rather build on green fields because building on brown field sites costs more. Thus, there are significant consequences from the Paper's proposals. Even more so-called protected zones will be lost and little built in renewal zones. There are large parts of England, especially in the North where there are opportunities for housing renewal and provision of new employment, but the Paper will massively increase the population densities of rural counties in the South and decrease housing in the North. This does not fit in with the government's levelling up agenda.

The subject of changes to green belt is conveniently ignored in the white paper, but the important consequence is that a green belt is no longer defined by a local or county body , and the decision-making is, by definition, removed to central government.

There are clear rules under the NPPF at present about when a local body can justify removal of a bit of the green belt, or as is more common, justify giving planning permission on it. The White Paper has removed this decision on the definition of green belt from County, which is in theory accountable to local electors, and gives it to Whitehall, which is not. Under the changes there will be no reason why the Department of the Environment cannot simply lop off a bit of green belt without any appeal process. The idea that green belt is somehow sacrosanct and preserved by the new proposals is just not true; it can be changed unilaterally. The consequences are obvious for Corfe Mullen, a prime target for rapid unnecessary development.

The process of demonstrating need for housing is inverted. Central Government states that X number should be built in an area, but does not demonstrate why, or show that there is a clear need. The need for house building is replaced by a want for house building by those who benefit from building houses, and by central directive from Whitehall. The nod to local consultation by improved electronic communication means little. Approximately 20% of the population do not have access to this and it is rare for large plans to be over-ruled by local consultation once made.

The changes to the Schedule 106 levy will, by delaying its payment until sale takes place, heap further cost on local and county authorities. It makes it less, not more, possible for infrastructure costs which are born centrally - roads and hospitals for instance, to benefit from the levy.

The NPPF was not all good, but it was not all bad either and could have easily been improved on. To tear it up and start again with the proposed changes is beyond comprehension.

Locally the consequences are dire. Corfe Mullen is on the north edge of Poole and, if nearly all our Green Belt is built on to provide for these national targets we will merge into the conurbation and our identity and valued green spaces for our community will be lost and local people will have no say at all.