

Chesil Bank Parish Council

Incorporating the villages of Portesham, Abbotsbury, Langton Herring and Fleet

Chesil Bank Parish Council Response on the Dorset Local Plan 2021-2038

Dorset Council has produced a plan which seeks to address the Governments agenda for required housing targets, environmental issues, reduction of Co2 emissions and employment expansion.

We understand that Dorset Council are trying to meet the Governments requirement for provision of land for housing for the next 5 years.

We now have an update that the Council believe that the new housing target should be revised upwards to be increased by approximately 28.5%.

Councillor David Walsh says that the county needs the additional housing numbers in the revised Dorset Local Plan because it is likely to have to take a share of the unmet demand from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and the New Forest.

This is unacceptable as BCP and New Forest are separate councils entirely and should be required to meet their own demands/quotas, not to move them to adjacent areas.

This increase, if implemented, will only exacerbate the problems discussed below.

Most importantly, sites promoted need to be supported by sound infrastructure requirements so that the sites are actually developed according to plans envisaged and not just huge areas of housing.

The plan has been produced for public consultation during the third Covid19 lockdown. It has therefore been very difficult for members of the public to access a hard copy of the plan. We ourselves as a Parish Council have been refused access to a hard copy and it is a lengthy and complicated document.

There has been no opportunity for face-to-face consultation and accessibility to the plan is not easy. We feel that the plan discourages people to comment in the way they would like to and it is of poor readability.

The timescale for comment is too short, taking into consideration the lack of opportunity for public debate.

The public are invited to make responses in the form of replies to specific questions which we feel is a very restrictive format and does not encourage free comment.

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Our main comments as a parish council will refer to Portesham and Chesil Bank Parish, and to the large development of new housing in the Chickerell area.

We have considered how these issues impact on the local population of Portesham and Chesil Bank Parish, the Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of the Chesil Bank and the Fleet Lagoon and the population of Weymouth.

Portesham

The new Local Plan proposes 33 new dwellings in the Chesil Bank Parishes with only Portesham, being the largest of the 4 Parishes and the only one with a DDB, identified as suitable and sustainable.

In the past few years there have been numerous new dwellings, garages and storage buildings built, including a development of 22 properties in Portesham.

The topography of Portesham, situated under the chalk Blackdown Hills, is full of natural springs. The majority of any building work displaces water in an area that is already prone to flooding. There have been major flooding issues and concerns since the development of 22 houses was built two years ago on a water meadow and this remains a serious and difficult ongoing problem.

The areas outlined as suitable for development are situated at both the top and lower down the village. Professional bodies have previously advised that the drainage infrastructure under Front Street is not capable of dealing with any more surface water and when planning was given for the 22-house development, that the sewage system was only just about adequate. Therefore another 33 houses are completely unacceptable and unviable.

To date permission has been granted for 7 new dwellings as yet to be built, leaving allocation for another 26. If these are all destined for Portesham the flooding issues will increase enormously and it is our opinion that this avoidable, detrimental situation must not be permitted to happen.

Portesham school has a mixed population of children from many different areas with 52% pupils coming from the combined areas of Dorchester, Weymouth, Chickerell, Wyke Regis, Portland and Winterbourne Abbas. This statistic represents parental choice. The choice parents make about a primary school also often takes into account the secondary school that this school feeds into. Portesham school feeds into Budmouth secondary school and we expect that this exercise of permitted choice is one parents will continue to make. The

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parents of these children are travelling significant distances to give their children the education of their choice. This means that 46% of the pupils of Portesham school are travelling from the Weymouth and Portland area along the B3157 coast road to school every day.

A housing development of over 26 new family homes will overburden our small village school which has limited places, meaning that new children to the area will be forced to be driven to schools outside their area of residence.

Dorset Council planning department need to listen to local voices when developments are proposed in such areas so as not to leave a legacy of flood issues for the village to manage.

The capacity and infrastructure cannot sustain further development on this scale in this village.

We repeat that It is our opinion that this avoidable and detrimental situation must not be allowed to happen.

Chickerell Development and its Impact on the Chesil Bank and the Fleet Lagoon

It is proposed to build a minimum of a further 802 homes to add to the 292 recently given consent. This is a huge expansion to an area which has only recently been granted town status.

Chickerell lies within 5 km of Chesil Bank and the Fleet lagoon and it is noted within the Plan that recreational use is already causing damage to this globally significant site.

The area of Chesil Bank and the Fleet Lagoon are protected by a number of important safeguards. They lie within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and within the Jurassic Coast world Heritage Site. Further protection is afforded by RAMSAR (International environmental treaty for wetland sites UNESCO), SSI Site of special Scientific interest and it has been designated as a Site of National and International importance for Nature Conservation.

The plan states that it will have to make a provision to provide a capital sum to offset the further damage that is expected to be inflicted by the huge increase of housing in the area.

How much the sums will be and how it will enable protection of these areas are not addressed, nor are any timescales regarding the allocation of this money. This statement is simply not enough.

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Our submission is that the Chesil Bank and the Fleet Lagoon are such significant areas with very fragile ecosystems that they deserve the highest level of protection from the damaging results of increased population. We do not believe that this Plan is taking this issue with the seriousness that it deserves.

We request Dorset Council to consult with Natural England and all the other regulatory bodies, before granting planning permission for extensive housing near these sensitive sites.

Once a fragile ecosystem is damaged (as we are seeing in very many globally important sites such as this) it is not possible to repair that damage easily with a grant of money. In particular, there is an established breeding colony of great crested newts within the Chickerell boundaries. These are now rare will be seriously affected by loss of their habitat.

The effects upon Chesil Bank Parish, Chickerell and the wider population

Employment

The Plan states that the population of Weymouth and its surrounding areas are predominantly employed in low paid service jobs and that there is significant deprivation in some areas.

It also states that Chickerell itself has very limited facilities and employment opportunities.

The Plan sets as its aspiration that individuals should travel less than half an hour by public transport or a 20-minute car journey to their place of employment. This is to improve Co2 emissions and to contribute to healthy lifestyles.

We do not feel this aspiration regarding travel to work will be met.

The area of Chickerell has extremely limited employment opportunities and it is therefore likely that the occupants of these new homes will be travelling long distances to their employment. Going against the principles of Dorset's own Plan. This would be exacerbated further if Chesil Bank and Chickerell areas have to accept the urban overspill from BCP and New Forest, as perceived by Councillor David Walsh.

There is some limited expansion of employment expected, in further expansion of the already existing small industrial estates but it is evident that the increased population will continue to work in the wider area of Dorset.

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There are many existing local rural businesses and the Plan should support them to provide sustainable improvements including those which address climate change issues. Broadband and internet connectivity issues remain an issue in the rural areas. This has been ignored by the plan.

Healthy Lives and Infrastructure

Medical Care

At present there is no general or maternity hospital to serve the population of Weymouth, Chickerell and Portland. The Weymouth Hospital provides a minor injury service and a minor illness service. It also has an Xray department and Physiotherapy department.

All significant illness is diagnosed and treated at Dorset County Hospital.

The Accident and Emergency department was designed to meet the needs of 22,000 patients a year but even before the pandemic it was dealing with 55,000 patients a year illustrating beyond doubt the massive increase in patient numbers already using our hospital.

Expansion is planned for Dorset County Hospital but this is mainly to provide a new multi-storey car park, a new Accident and Emergency department and some community GP facilities

This expansion must be viewed in conjunction with the closure of many small hospitals in the Dorset area and the plans to build on the site of Westhaven Hospital in Weymouth. The real situation is that we have already got a large increase in population and even with this expansion, a significant loss inpatient of bedspace.

The Government has no plans to build a new hospital in Weymouth to facilitate the health of the large increase in the population of Weymouth, Chickerell and Portland. Taking into account the expected increase in population in Dorchester and Crossways under this Plan, Dorset County Hospital will soon be struggling to cope in normal situations let alone during a pandemic.

Chickerell itself has only a small part time satellite GP surgery. Land allocated for it during Grey's fields estate was found to be inadequate and construction did not go ahead. This matter is now urgent.

A new site has been proposed and the matter is out to public consultation, but this badly needed facility is still some time away from existence.

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Education

Chickerell has a primary school which has now become an academy. It was built to accommodate the needs of Chickerell as a village and is now oversubscribed. This is despite an extension completed in 2015 to add extra classrooms.

Dorset Council has noted that Chickerell already needs an additional primary school. There is no evidence that this will be produced in the near future. It is one thing to “note” the need but unless it is actually proposed in the Plan, it is effectively ignored.

Healthy Lifestyles are an excellent ideal to aspire to but how do the Dorset Council intend to achieve this for children and young people in the area if they have to attend overcrowded schools with limited recreational spaces?

In an area already suffering from deprivation in parts, building large housing developments without the infrastructure in health, education and employment to support these new families is only going to increase the deprivation of the area.

There is a distinct lack of Higher Education establishments in Dorset. The plan should have highlighted the need for increased investment in this area. More opportunities need to be provided for young people in our area to access further education and work skills in new and developing technological and environmental industries .

We contend that infrastructure supporting new developments should be built before the houses, to prevent developers slipping out of their contract, as has already happened at Chickerell.

Affordable Homes

It is not possible to ascertain from the information in the Plan how many affordable homes will be actually built on the Chickerell site. This is an area of high house prices and low salaries. Many of the smaller homes in this area, are bought as second homes – what steps are the Council going to take to minimise this?

The plan must ensure that developments provide at least 35% of affordable homes for local people.

Developers want to build market value houses to maximise their profits. The Council must ensure that they employ robust procedures to hold developers to their contractual obligations to provide the required amount of affordable housing units.

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Local Transport and Infrastructure Links

Chesil Bank Parish Council notes that the Plan does not envisage any new road links to service the traffic that at present from Portland and Chickerell use the B3157 coast road to access the west of the county.

This road has been the subject of many accidents both fatal and minor, in the last five years and causes severe congestion to the villages of Portesham and Abbotsbury.

The increasing use of this road by HGV's has caused many problems at the T-junction at Rodden Row, Church and Market streets, where the road is often completely blocked, when such vehicles become jammed between the houses.

Local residents from the west side of Weymouth increasingly use this road especially during peak times to access the Poundbury, Charminster, Bridport areas because of congestion on the Weymouth relief road. This already causes severe problems in Portesham and Abbotsbury with heavy traffic using narrow roads and single lane cut through roads such as across Hardy's Monument.

The planned housing development of a minimum of 800 plus new homes will only exacerbate this very difficult situation for the villages of our Parish and traffic conditions will become intolerable and emissions of vehicles unhealthy.

Dorset -wide Transport and Infrastructure Links

In addition to the above, the whole of Dorset suffers from incredibly poor transport and infrastructure. There are a small number of short dual carriageways in the County and most of those are too short to improve traffic flow. The rail links are poor, with the route to the north and through Maiden Newton to Bath/Bristol and beyond being particularly bad. Both railway stations in Dorchester are poor with the Great Western station being unmanned and for passengers heading North, there is no access for any disabled passengers.

We propose that Dorset Council should consider providing many more, safe cycle routes. Cyclists on our narrow, busy, twisting roads are at risk and also inhaling harmful vehicle emissions.

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Portland and Weymouth Ports

Both the current Dorset County Council and its' predecessors seem to consider that the two ports in the county require no further consideration and this seems to be a major missed opportunity for both tourism and commercial activities.

The re-instatement of the cross-Channel ferries would seem to be a first and easy step, although again this would require major infrastructure investment possibly leading to "Free Port" status.

Design

All new developments need to have photovoltaic panels, and either ground source or air heat pump heating systems, together with all other possible energy reduction systems installed.

Conclusion

We contend that to meet the Dorset Council's own targets on healthy lives and reducing carbon emissions, Dorset Council needs to critically revise its ambitious targets for housing in the Chesil Bank and Chickerell area. Smaller developments than planned are the requirements for Chesil Bank Parish and Chickerell. Ones that have adequate provision for healthcare, educational and employment infrastructure and transport links to support the growing population.

We do not support the Council's view that our area should be expected to provide housing for unmet needs in Poole, Bournemouth and the new Forest.

As the proposed new Dorset Council Local Plan stands, it will fall woefully short of even the most basic expectations the Council suggests it can provide and achieve. We, therefore, call upon the Council to extend and simplify its public consultation and to revisit their plan and reduce the housing numbers suggested for Chesil Bank Parish and Chickerell.

Chesil Bank Parish Council 12th March 2021

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