

STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8th OCTOBER AT 7.15PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER



PRESENT:

Cllr P Batstone
Cllr L Cooper
Cllr N Dobson
Cllr A Donaldson
Cllr C Fraser
Cllr H Lacey
Cllr D Mantock (Chair)

IN ATTENDANCE:

K Squire (Town Clerk) J Drew (Office Administrator)
Dorset Councillor Carole Jones

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: 17

MINUTE NO	COMMENTS
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| 25/26/144 | To receive comments and questions from members of the public
Members of the public expressed their views regarding the proposed Dorset Council Local Plan. |
| 25/26/145 | Apologies for absence
Apologies were received from Cllrs Lacey and Rose. These apologies were accepted by members. |
| 25/26/146 | To approve declarations of interest and written applications for dispensation
No interests were declared and no written requests for dispensation received. |
| 25/26/147 | To decide on the Town Council response to the Dorset Council Local Plan Consultation
The Council fully discussed the Dorset Council Local Plan.
The Council resolved to agree that the Clerk collate the Council's extensive observations into a formal email response to send to Dorset Council. This would be sent to Councillors by email prior to sending.
For information purposes, the response sent is attached to these minutes. |

The Chair closed the meeting at 7.59pm

Chairs Signature..... Date Approved

STURMINSTER NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL

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Response to Dorset Council Local Plan Consultation

Dear Planning Policy Team,

Sturminster Newton Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Dorset Council Local Plan (2026–2043). We appreciate the scale of challenge in balancing growth, infrastructure, and environmental protection, and we wish to make constructive observations to ensure the Local Plan delivers sustainable and appropriate development for our community.

1. Ensuring Housing Delivery

The Council remains concerned that allocated housing sites are too often left undeveloped, with land held speculatively by developers. We urge Dorset Council to adopt measures that ensure timely delivery — such as phasing conditions, time limits, or mechanisms to reallocate stalled sites — to avoid distortion of housing supply and community expectations.

2. Strategic Growth and Infrastructure

Members believe that large, well-planned settlements with built-in infrastructure are preferable to scattered extensions to existing towns. Incremental “peppering” of small developments around established communities places unsustainable pressure on local roads, schools, healthcare, utilities, and other services. Future growth should be supported by robust infrastructure planning — including energy capacity, drainage, water, and digital connectivity — before sites are allocated.

3. Countryside and Green Belt Protection

The protection of Dorset’s countryside and valued landscapes is a key local priority. The Council is very concerned that the proposed “flexible settlement” policy risks weakening settlement boundaries defined in our Neighbourhood Plan and could open the door to inappropriate countryside development.

We therefore request:

- Stronger safeguards for existing green belt and rural land;
- Clear criteria for any boundary changes or “flexible” growth policies; and
- Alignment with the adopted Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan (2016–2031), which remains part of the statutory development plan.

4. Site-Specific Concerns

A357 Site:

The enlarged site proposed along the A357 is identified within the draft Local Plan itself as having potential flood risk. We therefore question its suitability for allocation on that basis. The existing industrial estate in the same area already faces limited power capacity and constraints on sewage infrastructure, both of which must be addressed before any further development is considered.

Manston Direction:

Development toward Manston risks physically pulling the town's footprint further from its centre, creating isolated enclaves detached from community life. Should this area be pursued, it will be essential to include community facilities, open space, and safe pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre and schools.

5. Site Viability, Infrastructure Costs & Developer Obligations

Any allocated site must undergo rigorous and transparent viability testing.

Infrastructure costs — including drainage, roads, landscaping, flood mitigation, and community facilities — can make a site unviable, leading to delays or reduced contributions. Dorset Council should:

- (a) publish infrastructure cost assumptions;
- (b) require enforceable developer contributions (S106 / CIL); and
- (c) avoid allocating sites whose infrastructure burden cannot reasonably be met by the developer.

6. Highways, Traffic and Access

The Local Plan should assess the cumulative transport impact of development rather than only individual sites. The Council requests that Dorset Council undertakes and publishes detailed traffic modelling for Sturminster Newton and its approaches, including junctions, road widths, and pedestrian safety. Allocations should only proceed where safe and sustainable access can be demonstrated without undue cost to the community.

7. Flood Risk, Surface Water & Drainage

Beyond the A357 site, other proposed allocations may also face drainage or runoff issues. All sites must be fully assessed within the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and be required to include sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), flood resilience, and proof that no increase in downstream flood risk will result. Developers should be required to model and demonstrate that new development will not exacerbate flooding anywhere in the town.

8. Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience

The Local Plan must address adaptation as well as carbon reduction. New developments should be designed to withstand future climate conditions such as extreme heat, drought, and heavy rainfall. The Council recommends that policies explicitly require:

- passive cooling and shading,
- water efficiency and rainwater harvesting,
- biodiversity net gain, green infrastructure, and habitat connectivity, and

- clear “resilience standards” for all major sites.

This will future-proof new homes and reduce long-term environmental costs.

9. Renewable Energy and Energy Infrastructure

We note that the Local Plan identifies “renewable energy opportunity areas.” While the Council supports renewable energy in principle, its siting must not cause unacceptable harm to landscape, heritage, or ecology.

We also highlight that the local electricity distribution network already faces capacity constraints. Future development should include on-site renewable generation (solar, battery, heat networks) and require grid capacity upgrades in advance of occupation to support net zero targets.

10. Community Infrastructure and Local Services

New housing growth must be matched by provision of essential community infrastructure — schools, healthcare, recreation, social spaces, and community halls. Dorset Council’s evidence base should identify and address existing local shortfalls in these services. In particular, Sturminster Newton’s primary and secondary schools, GP practice, and recreational facilities must be safeguarded and expanded to meet future needs.

We ask that all significant allocations include clear commitments or contributions toward these facilities, either on-site or via financial mechanisms. Allotment provision for new developments rather than mitigation CIL payments is essential.

11. Housing Design and Mix

The Council wishes to avoid monotonous housing design. New development should reflect the town’s character and include a genuine mix of house sizes, styles, and tenures. Smaller and more affordable homes are particularly needed to attract and retain younger residents.

Dorset Council should require design codes or masterplans to ensure quality, distinctiveness, and local identity.

12. Local Employment and the Economy

Our community cannot sustain further housing growth without parallel provision for employment. Sturminster Newton has very limited job opportunities, and additional housing without local work would create a commuter town rather than a thriving community.

We urge the Local Plan to safeguard and allocate employment land, promote small business and digital enterprise, and support measures to strengthen the local economy.

13. Connectivity and Active Travel

Any new development must provide safe and direct pedestrian and cycle routes linking homes to the town centre, schools, and services. Public transport access should be designed in from the outset, not retrofitted. The Council strongly supports development patterns that reduce car dependence and enhance walkability.

14. Phasing, Monitoring and Review

The Local Plan must include clear monitoring frameworks and phasing controls. Allocations should be tied to delivery milestones — for example, infrastructure and community facilities delivered before later housing phases. Dorset Council should

publish measurable indicators (housing completions, infrastructure delivery, traffic impacts, school places) and conduct regular reviews to ensure the Plan remains deliverable and responsive.

15. Equality, Health and Environmental Justice

The Council supports Dorset Council's Equality Impact Assessment but believes the Plan should go further. All new development should promote inclusion and wellbeing. Allocations should be tested for:

- accessibility for elderly and disabled residents,
- health impacts (air quality, noise, light, access to open space),
- protection from flood or heat stress, and
- equitable distribution of environmental benefits.

Summary of Requests

To summarise, Sturminster Newton Town Council requests that Dorset Council:

1. Include mechanisms to prevent land banking and ensure delivery.
2. Prioritise properly planned settlements with built-in infrastructure.
3. Protect countryside and green belt land from incremental erosion.
4. Require diverse and high-quality housing design.
5. Link housing growth to new employment opportunities.
6. Ensure pedestrian and sustainable transport connectivity.
7. Plan and phase development in line with infrastructure delivery.
8. Embed climate resilience, equality, and community wellbeing into all policies.
9. Fully respect the adopted Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan (2016–2031).

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation and would welcome further engagement as the Plan progresses.

Sincerely

K Squire

Kate Squire
Town Clerk
Sturminster Newton Town Council