

Corfe Mullen Parish Council: Participant Statement

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this statement is to set out the position of this council in relation to the proposed urban extension at Corfe Mullen.
- 1.2 The council is opposed to the proposal for an urban extension at Corfe Mullen and asks the Panel to recommend its deletion from the RSS.
- 1.3 The council questions the need for additional housing at the levels proposed and argues that it would lead in the longer term to an increase in the need for affordable housing and greater isolation and deprivation.
- 1.4 The proposed urban extension is in an unsustainable location and therefore contrary to the RSS vision of creating a sustainable conurbation. It is poorly served by transport, retail and social facilities and is situated away from employment sites. An urban extension here would increase the need to travel by car and substantial infrastructure improvements would be required, for which developer contributions would not suffice.
- 1.5 The development would cause harm to the village's numerous sensitive environments, and there are no benefits that outweigh this. The RSS vision of protecting and enhancing the environment will be impossible to achieve.
- 1.6 The Area of Search N is the last piece of high quality landscape and the most significant area of Green Belt left in the village.
- 1.7 Local opinion is strongly against the proposals.

2 Role of the HMA and the need for additional housing

- 2.1 The role of the Bournemouth & Poole HMA should be to serve as a sustainable major conurbation for South East Dorset, providing employment and housing, whilst protecting and enhancing its important natural environment. With its strong links to South Hants, it is important to avoid providing additional residential accommodation largely to serve commuters working there. It should also be recognised that with 100% of the HMA being within 5km of sensitive internationally protected environmental sites, it must surely be ultimately of finite size in terms of development.
- 2.2 It is proposed that new housing development in the south east sub-region is required to attract workers to meet future economic growth. However, economic forecasts are rather uncertain, and the RSS must be careful only to propose housing in line with economic growth rather simply meeting housing demand, which could lead to creation of a 'commuter conurbation' and an unacceptably high increase in in-migration. In any event, economic growth does not have to be dependent on an increase in the population: there is much scope for upskilling the current population and developing knowledge-based industries, for example.

- 2.3 The additional housing in Corfe Mullen would mainly serve incomers to the area, and experience tells us that many of the incomers would be retired or semi-retired affluent people. This would put extreme further pressure on local housing prices, leading to further affordability problems for local people, and therefore a yet higher need for affordable housing than is already the case.
- 2.4 The proposed levels of housing can therefore be questioned, both in terms of economic growth and affordability of housing. It is this council's contention that the proposed urban extension in Corfe Mullen could actually lead in the longer term to worsened affordability issues, greater future need for affordable housing, and an increase in deprivation. It would not therefore meet local need.

3 The contribution of the proposed urban extension at Corfe Mullen

- 3.1 The need for an urban extension at Corfe Mullen, to the north west of the conurbation, is questioned given the comments in Section 2 above. The proposed area is a significant distance away from existing employment sites, neither is it near the proposed new strategic employment site at Bournemouth Airport. This will definitely mean an increase in commuting within the conurbation to and from Corfe Mullen, totally against the current government policy which aims to reduce carbon emissions.
- 3.2 Corfe Mullen is on the very edge of the conurbation and although there is a physical connection to Poole, it is very much a separate village and not a 'suburb'. The main centres of the conurbation are only easily accessible by car and transport and facilities within the village are very limited. The majority of Corfe Mullen residents see themselves as villagers.
- 3.3 The Corfe Mullen urban extension would in reality only provide up to 40% affordable housing, no more than 280 units over the life of the RSS. This is extremely insignificant compared to the *current* need of affordable units in the East Dorset District of 600 per year.
- 3.4 On the other hand, the provision of up to 700 homes in a village of 4300 homes is a significant increase for a village with limited facilities, and particularly poor public transport.
- 3.5 The majority of the new housing would attract incomers who would almost certainly be car users, adding further pressure to the local roads, and the A31. This would be in direct conflict with the RSS aims of reducing the need to travel.
- 3.6 It is difficult therefore to see the contribution an urban extension at Corfe Mullen could make to the HMA other than exacerbating current congestion problems and increasing the need for affordable housing in the longer term.

4 Sustainability

- 4.1 This council believes that the proposed urban extension at Corfe Mullen is unsustainable and therefore does not meet the objectives of the RSS.
- 4.2 As outlined in Section 3 above, Corfe Mullen is on the very periphery of the HMA. It serves a population of nearly 11000 yet has very little employment and facilities. In addition it is a very elongated village with no obvious centre. It is largely a commuter village, with most of its working population commuting out into the conurbation and sub-region as a whole. It is also home to a large number of retired people, who travel by car to access facilities in the main centres of the conurbation.
- 4.3 The village has extremely poor public transport. Apart from one infrequent bus route that serves the very edge of the village, there is no direct access to Wimborne, the village's administrative centre. The only other bus routes are those into the Poole and Bournemouth area provided under subsidy from the County Council. The County Council is currently undertaking an Efficiency Review of Transport and proposing a public transport saving over the next three years of £300,000; therefore the future of the current subsidised route is far from certain. Given that the majority of the housing at an urban extension in Corfe Mullen would be likely to go to car users, it is unlikely that the commercial operator will alter its strategy to withdrawal all routes through Corfe Mullen, were the urban extension to proceed.
- 4.4 Retail and social facilities are also limited. There are no banks, and many residents have to travel to access dental and other health facilities. The library is likely to close in the next year as the County Council withdraws funding. The Area of Search N is off the main plateau of the village, so new housing would be remote from the village's already limited facilities.
- 4.5 The steepness of the slopes away from the plateau make it impossible for some and unlikely for most to be able to walk or cycle even up to the village facilities, therefore there would be no reduction in the need to travel by car, on the contrary, the village would see much more car travel.
- 4.6 Recreational facilities are already under extreme pressure in the village. Demand for sports pitches far outweighs supply and there is a lack of open space for children and young people in the village.
- 4.7 In summary, Corfe Mullen is already living on the edge of sustainability, and is therefore not a sustainable location for an urban extension. Providing additional housing down the slopes from the village's plateau, away from the facilities, would lead to isolation and deprivation in the longer term.

5 Infrastructure

- 5.1 The proposed urban extension at Corfe Mullen would require significant improvements to infrastructure. It is impossible that developer contributions would be sufficient to meet the required costs of such improvements, yet there is no public funding offered in the sub-region.
- 5.2 In Corfe Mullen, an urban extension would require a range of infrastructure improvements, ranging from upgrading the A31, better public transport and more social and retail facilities. Green infrastructure would be required to provide recreational areas for the increased population.
- 5.3 Also, due to the limited groundwater capacity, there would be a need for additional reservoir storage or water tower and new trunk mains.
- 5.4 Any infrastructure would need to be provided in step with development yet this is unlikely to be affordable without public funding.

6 Heathland and Appropriate Assessment

- 6.1 The proposed urban extension at Corfe Mullen is in close proximity to Upton Heath SSSI and this is a major factor when assessing its appropriateness for development.
- 6.2 The SWRA commissioned additional technical work following the publication of the Draft RSS into the Appropriate Assessment of development plans and projects in South East Dorset. This report, by David Tyldesley and Associates¹ is now available and concludes that there remains still a need for further work. In particular the report highlights the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of mitigation measures - which are to date untested.
- 6.3 What is clear from the report is that the numbers of nightjars, Dartford warblers and woodlarks are reduced where there is more development near to heathland sites. There is evidence that dogs are flushing out adult nightjars and that cats are a major predator of Dartford warblers. In addition, the report clearly shows that greater fragmentation of heathland directly relates to population number of these three species.
- 6.4 The report also shows that people travel by car in excess of 5km to access heathland sites and concludes therefore that additional development even outside the 400m zone will lead to a significant increase in visitor numbers. 100% of the Area of Search N is within 5km of heathland. It remains very uncertain that peoples' habits will change to the extent that they can be attracted away from using heathland sites.

¹ Evidence to support Appropriate Assessment of development plans and projects in south-east Dorset, David Tyldesley and Associates. See http://www.southwestra.gov.uk/media/SWRA/RSS%20Documents/Technical%20Documents/Technical%20Work/Footprint_et_a_l_Dorset_evidence_base_January_8th_2007.pdf

7 Nature conservation

- 7.1 The Area of Search N at Corfe Mullen is largely unimproved agricultural land. Its landscape is of very high quality and unspoiled. Apart from being situated in close proximity to the heathland, there are a number of other SSSIs within the area of search that have important nature conservation value and which also need to be protected.
- 7.2 The provision of alternative green space would therefore be difficult to achieve as it would have to be extensive enough to attract people away from the heath, yet also be away from other important nature conservation sites. It is this council's belief that there is no suitable land on the scale required to provide additional green infrastructure.
- 7.3 It is also important to remember that the area surrounding the heathland, such as that within the Area of Search N, is important foraging land for a variety of heathland species.

8. Green Belt

- 8.1 If development were allowed in the Area of Search N at Corfe Mullen, it would effectively mean a sprawling of the village itself down from its plateau, thus detracting from the openness of the village setting. The area forms the last piece of high quality landscape left around the village and much of it is designated by the local planning authority as an Area of Great Landscape Value. In local terms, this would have a severe impact.
- 8.2 The loss of the Green Belt here would therefore be significant yet the gains it would bring would not. The overall number of housing units provided would not make a considerable contribution to development within the HMA and the level of affordable housing provided would be insignificant. The further attraction of incomers would in fact lead to a greater increase in affordable housing need in the future. The development would put increased pressure on a village already struggling with sustainability and would cause harm to its sensitive environment.
- 8.3 It is therefore this council's contention that realignment of Green Belt would on balance bring disbenefit to the village and the HMA.
- 8.4 Furthermore, the RSS must take some responsibility for development beyond the life of the plan: using designated Green Belt now for new development will mean further encroachment in the future being seen to be acceptable.

9 Local opinion

- 9.1 The Corfe Mullen Parish Plan shows that 88% of people want to preserve the countryside around the village. 72% believe that all Green Belt land in the village should be retained and not used for housing. Over half of all residents want development in the village to continue only at current levels and 90% of young people do not want more housing in the village.

- 9.2 In addition 42-45% believe that urgent improvement would be needed to shops, retail and residential parking, roads, public transport, schools and medical/dental facilities if a significant number of new homes were built. This demonstrates public awareness of the sustainability issues as well as the concerns with loss of Green Belt.
- 9.3 Over 4,500 letters objecting to any building on Corfe Mullen's Green Belt have been submitted and presented to the Panel. This represents 55% of the total electorate.
- 9.4 The community in Corfe Mullen do not want the last remaining piece of Green Belt used as an urban extension. Their views must clearly be taken into account when planning for the village's future.

10 Conclusion

- 10.1 There is currently poor justification for an urban extension at Corfe Mullen. Uncertainty surrounds economic forecasts, future housing need and the effect of development on the affordability of the housing market.
- 10.2 The urban extension would make a very insignificant contribution to the role of the HMA yet would bring great disbenefit.
- 10.3 The proposal does not meet the objectives of the RSS in sustainability terms. It would lead to isolation, deprivation and a greater need for affordable housing. It would not reduce the need to travel and therefore would bring an increase in carbon emissions.
- 10.4 There is insufficient funding provision for necessary infrastructure improvements and unrealistic expectations of developer contributions.
- 10.4 The environmental constraints outweigh any benefits of development and the loss of Green Belt would have severe local impact and cause local disquiet. The proposal of an urban extension would damage the environment, in direct opposition to the RSS objective of protecting and enhancing the environment.
- 10.6 The RSS needs to re-examine its proposals in order to achieve a sustainable conurbation in South East Dorset.