

Dorset National Park Team response to consultation on Dorset Council Local Plan, March 2021

Dorset needs a Local Plan that meets the needs of communities and businesses, including for truly affordable homes and a range of appropriate spaces to support economic development. Such a Local Plan should respect and protect Dorset's outstanding environment, our greatest economic asset. The future health of everyone as well as our economy depends on this.

The Government reaffirmed in November 2020 its manifesto commitment to create new National Parks and to start the designation in 2021. Dorset is widely seen as the outstanding candidate. The Dorset Council would remain the lead local authority throughout rural Dorset. The National Park, bringing additional resources and expertise, would complement and contribute to the Council's work and strategic objectives, including helping to secure a thriving, sustainable future for Dorset's communities, economy and environment; caring for Dorset's environment and heritage (including the World Heritage Jurassic Coast, Britain's only World Heritage Site designated for its natural environment); improving health & wellbeing; and addressing effectively the climate and ecological emergencies. A National Park would initially develop with the Dorset Council and others a Partnership Management Plan. The Dorset Council and the National Park would then work together to develop a shared Local Plan which would update the 2023/24 Dorset Council Local Plan. The National Park would contribute financially to the cost of the development and delivery of a shared Local Plan by a joint planning team.

National planning practice guidance (NPPG) provides that where a planning authority (such as the Dorset Council) shares an area with a National Park, a local methodology may be used for calculating housing need for the whole of that planning authority's area (ie not just within the area of the National Park) in place of the government's standard methodology. Any alternative approach should take as its starting point the area's projected demographic growth and would be subject to satisfactory justification at examination. A Dorset National Park therefore offers the opportunity to develop a Local Plan for the whole of the Dorset Council area, based on a local assessment of housing needs and economic aspirations.

The South Downs National Park (SDNP), England's newest National Park and Dorset's relevant comparator, worked with local communities to develop the SDNP Local Plan which came into effect in 2020. The SDNP supported the development of some 60 Neighbourhood Plans as an important contribution to that Local Plan. Their Local Plan provides for the development of several thousand homes on a dispersed basis in communities across the SDNP area, reflecting the duty placed on National Parks to "respond proactively to local housing need".

We look forward to the Government confirming Dorset's outstanding candidacy for National Park status and to Natural England carrying out their long-awaited evaluation of Dorset's compelling case.

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