

## Focus Group Takeaways

### *Purpose of Report*

This report presents the messages that have been distilled from the focus group notes for the Steering Group to review and consider whether they can be used to underpin certain policies in the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

### *Introduction*

As most members of the Steering Group were active participants in one or more of the focus groups that were held in February 2023, I do not need to explain their purpose or format. I would like to take the opportunity however to thank everyone who took part in a positive manner and remind you that the purpose of the focus groups was on interpreting the collective community response to the January 2023 Questionnaire.

The Questionnaire asked 10 key questions relating to important land use issues and opportunities, which I felt needed a public airing before the draft Neighbourhood Plan could be completed.

With the Steering Group's endorsement, I hope to be able to take away sufficiently strong messages to be confident that the draft Neighbourhood Plan represents the views and aspirations of the majority of the population of the Weymouth area.

### *Report*

Members will have had the benefit of reading the Workshop Notes Report prepared by DCF. I have used these notes to prepare a set of land use-related take-aways from each of the focus group sessions. These are set out on the pages that follow, group by group, question by question. For each of the questions I have offered a short commentary suggesting how these take-aways might influence the content of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Members' comments are invited on the 'NP Implications' as I have understood them.

### *Next Steps*

If members are generally content with the way the messages have been heard, I shall finalise a first draft of the Neighbourhood Plan ready for restricted circulation by the end of March 2023. Members will then have an opportunity to review how the messages have influenced policies in the Plan and a further opportunity to consider whether the community's messages have been listened to.

Members will recognise that many of the community's 'messages' are not land-use related. These should be separately compiled and reported to the Town Council for information and possible action.

### *Acknowledgment*

I would like to place on record my thanks to the team at DCF for comprehending the purpose of the focus groups and making them happen so efficiently and effectively; and staff at the Town Council for their help with the essential organisation and administration.

# Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan

## Focus Group Take-aways – March 2023

### Communities Workshop (Mon 20th February 1.15–3.00pm)

*Discussion Point 1 Travel* – How can we ensure our communities are safer and more enjoyable places to live by reducing the negative impacts of transport?

- *Facilitate greater public transport use by local people*
- *Promote cycling and walking with safe links to key locations and facilities*
- *Liaise with schools*
- *Provide more year-round park and ride*
- *Facilitate electric vehicle charging*

NP Implications:

Promote ways to make cycling a more appealing option and public transport easier to access. Ensure parking policies are in synergy with the objectives and other policies in the NP.

*Discussion Point 2 Cycling* – How can we improve and extend the cycleway network in a way that will be effective and acceptable to the community?

- *Extend dedicated network with additional routes*
- *More modal separation*
- *More local education and promotion*
- *Develop local cycling strategy, with community consultation*
- *Learn from others nationally and internationally*
- *Focus on linking key locations and routes e.g. Lodmoor to TC*

NP Implications:

Include enabling policies that improve and extend safe cycling routes with greater modal split. Identify key links and routes. Include cycle paths in major new developments.

*Discussion Point 3 Redundant Buildings/Areas* – Which obsolete and redundant buildings and sites should the NP focus on, why and what for?

- *Focus on those owned by DC to realise community benefits*
- *Few additional locations identified*
- *Mixed use redevelopment is favoured*
- *Opportunities to provide for young people*

NP Implications:

Ensure community's feelings (and priorities) are known. Identify obvious opportunities. Liaise with owners to discuss prospects.

*Discussion Point 4 Renewable Energy* – What renewable energy measures and schemes should we be promoting at a neighbourhood level?

- *Community is open to most renewable energy technologies, except biomass*
- *Flexible approach needed to allow for changes in technologies*
- *Encourage appropriate installations in conservation areas*
- *Wind turbines offshore may be acceptable*
- *Support community energy projects/hub*

NP Implications:

Plan can be positive and include enabling policies for a variety of technologies. Need to recognise the inevitability of changing technologies. Promote retrofitting. Recognise value of community-based and neighbourhood initiatives.

*Discussion Point 5 Green Gaps* – Is it still relevant to keep and protect gaps and reinforce distinctions between settlements and communities?

- *Green gaps / community buffer zones are relevant and supported by the community*

NP Implications:

Include green gap policy in the Plan based on current important open gaps (modified). Consider including additional areas based on policies in the NP.

### **Sustainable Environments Workshop (Mon 20th February 3.15-4.30pm)**

*Discussion Point 1 Climate Change Emergency* – How should we interpret and make best use of the community response to the strategic environmental objectives?

- *Acknowledge community support and use it to justify cross-cutting nature of objectives*
- *Ensure NP embraces the positivity and translates into meaningful land use policy*

NP Implications:

Plan can acknowledge strength of community support and changing attitudes. Link Plan to wider context (national, county and community plans, TC strategy)

*Discussion Point 2 Environmental Targets* – How can we arrive at a locally approved set of environmental targets?

- *Need to develop a set of locally relevant SMART targets*
- *Engage with those bodies who can help with evidence and justification*
- *Involve local people in setting targets*
- *Set up monitoring regime*

NP Implications:

Cross reference in Plan to approved targets. Recognise important role of monitoring.

*Discussion Point 3 Environmental Strategy* - How do we get the wider community to recognise and buy in to the environmental strategy and its targets?

- *Promote benefits*
- *Use NPPF*
- *Acknowledge concerns and barriers*
- *Involve young people*
- *Simplify language and concepts for better understanding*
- *Positive commitment from DC regarding its own land*

NP Implications:

Characterise the NP as a 'greener than the average' Plan that responds and accords with community aspirations. Separately assess the greenness of the Plan. Identify 'benefits' on a policy-by-policy basis.

*Discussion Point 4 Renewable Energy* – Are there areas of land that could be used for renewable energy generation?

- *Solar panels as roofs on car parks including the park and ride*
- *Offshore is a possibility*
- *Include wind turbines in the mix*
- *Marginal agricultural land and the old tip are potential areas*
- *Consider potential of turbines on river Wey*

NP Implications:

Identify potential locations for major renewable energy installations. Assess impact as part of the SEA process.

*Discussion Point 5 Environmental Priorities* - Are there specific projects, schemes, or initiatives you are aware of that need to be recognised and supported by the NP?

- *Support community-based schemes*
- *Use Dorset Community Energy to encourage community-based schemes*
- *Link sustainable energy with affordable housing*

NP Implications:

Make reference to specific support for community-based initiatives. Recognise potential community partners and specific initiatives if they can be identified and shared learning from other locations.

## Jobs Workshop (Wed 22 February 1.15-3pm)

*Discussion Point 1 Large Employment Sites* - Which larger sites are suitable and acceptable for allocation as employment sites?

- *Jubilee Sidings – potentially better used as skills and training centre*
- *Lodmoor Old Tip – northern site could be productively used for employment purposes*
- *Mount Pleasant – large area with potential*
- *Sea Cadet site - could be suitable for workshop units*
- *Centenary Club – may have potential*
- *Westhaven Hospital - is a strategic housing opportunity*

NP Implications:

Consult with site owners. Include a policy that supports employment development in principle on appropriate sites. Consider whether a site-specific policy (detailing uses and development preferences) for some of the sites is justified, and the proposed redevelopment is achievable. Encourage preparation of an economic development strategy for Weymouth.

*Discussion Point 2 Town Centre Sites* – Should the town centre be regarded as a strategic employment area, if so, why, and what for?

- *Town Centre should be regarded as a key employment area*
- *Key to better employment opportunities is higher quality, higher skilled commercial activity*
- *Town Centre Masterplan need updating*
- *Character and appeal of the town centre needs enhancing*
- *More cultural venues would help*
- *Better housing provision in select locations would increase vibrancy*
- *Retain appeal for tourists*
- *Make good use of upper floors*

NP Implications:

Recognise the multi-functional (and changing) role of the town centre. Recognise its importance to local people. Promote development that enhances its image, significance and status and accords with an overall (updated) masterplan. Facilitate good use of all available floorspace. Enable commercial and business development that benefits from a town centre location. Recognise the value of hubs and co-working. Encourage appropriate good quality housing provision at higher densities than elsewhere.

*Discussion Point 3 Mixed Use* – Which sites are most suitable and acceptable for a mixed-use development?

- *Westwey House and adjoining land is prime mixed-use location*
- *New Bond Street area has regeneration potential*
- *North Quay Offices (owned By DC) has potential for mixed use including residential*
- *Lodmoor Gateway and car park – could serve better as a mixed-use area*
- *Bowling Alley – should include commercial activity as well as residential*
- *Post Office/Sorting Office – has mixed-use potential*
- *Could the Bus Station be re-located?*

NP Implications:

Consult with site owners. Include a policy that supports mixed use development/redevelopment in principle on appropriate sites. Consider whether a site-specific policy (detailing uses and development preferences) for some sites is justified, and the proposed redevelopment is achievable. Include a policy that supports mixed use development/redevelopment in principle on appropriate sites.

*Discussion Point 4 Car Parks* – Should we be protecting car parks, or car parking spaces in and around the town centre, or focusing on alternatives?

- *Town centre car parks are still relevant*
- *Sea front car parks would be prime development locations*
- *Parking spaces near the sea front are still much sought after in high season (causing pollution and congestion)*
- *Traffic free centre should be a long-term aspiration*

- *What should be reduced first? on-street or car parking capacity*
- *Potential for multi-storey at Swannery*
- *Maximise park and ride potential out of town*

NP Implications:

Recognise the on-going importance of car parks to the local economy and town centre (and people with mobility problems). Identify the incongruity of some of the existing car parks. Include a policy that enables the redevelopment of car park sites if they are no longer relevant, or a suitable number of spaces are provided elsewhere. Promote multi-storey provision as an option in certain locations (along with a solar roof). Encourage preparation of a (reviewable) car parking strategy for Weymouth.

*Discussion Point 5 Tourism* – What types of tourism provision should we be promoting?

- *Eco-tourism*
- *All-year round tourism*
- *Encourage cruise ships, 5\* hotel and high value visitors*
- *Promote heritage and natural environment*
- *Expand cultural offer*
- *Promote as centre for healthy activities*
- *Link with Portland*
- *Stronger modern identity*

NP Implications:

Facilitate sustainable tourism. Aim to take responsible advantage of the area's assets. Cross-reference approach to local studies and strategies. Encourage preparation of a tourism strategy for Weymouth.

### **Landscapes & Green Spaces Workshop (Wed 22<sup>nd</sup> February 3.15-4.30pm)**

*Discussion Point 1 Green Spaces* – Which sites should we be protecting and for what reasons?

- *We should protect as many green open spaces as it is possible to do so*
- *Sites identified in previous consultations are worthy of protection*
- *All playing fields should be protected*
- *Green corridors and important wildlife areas should be protected*
- *Catchment of the River Wey should be protected*
- *Additional sites suggested by community still need to be appraised*

NP Implications:

Include a sports and recreation areas policy. Include a 'coastal recreation area' policy. Include a Wey Valley policy. Designate all other nominated sites that meet the NPPF criteria as Local Green Space, which protects them from all forms of development.

*Discussion Point 2 Coastal Recreation Areas* – Should we be protecting coastal recreation areas from all development and change, or tolerating certain forms of development?

- *Need to acknowledge that these areas are part of Jurassic Coast*
- *Minor development that enhances community benefit may be acceptable in places*
- *keep these locations appealing to tourists*
- *seafront masterplan may inform decisions*
- *regarding specific locations:*
  - *the Fleet Coastal Access - unobtrusive development only*
  - *Bingleaves Open Space and Underbarn – minor development may be permissible*
  - *The Nothe Peninsula – minimal development (toilets and new play area)*
  - *Bowleaze Open space – valuable open space and café area, may need stabilising*
  - *Redcliffe Coastal Access – no development but footpath needs improving*

NP Implications:

Include a 'coastal recreation area' policy, which recognises their special character and location, and enables minor forms of development that strengthens their function and value to the community and visitors.

*Discussion Point 3 Allotments* - In which areas should we focus the provision of allotments/community growing areas?

- *Major developments should include community growing areas*
- *Upwey, Broadwey and Littlemoor areas lacks allotments*
- *Promote green roofs on large buildings*
- *Perhaps allotments on Jubilee Sidings*

NP Implications:

Include a policy that protects existing and facilitates new community horticulture sites. Identify priority areas and known opportunities. Promote community-based initiatives. Require community horticulture opportunities on major residential developments.

*Discussion Point 4 Riversides* – In what ways could river valleys play more of a part in community life?

- *Improved footpaths providing access and along the riverside would be appreciated*
- *Much of the land alongside the Wey is in private ownership*
- *Long-term aim to establish a footpath way from Upwey to Weymouth*
- *Wey is not suitable for water-based recreation*
- *Wey has hydro-power potential*
- *Nature trail with shelter/hides would be appropriate*

NP Implications:

Include a policy that offers general support for measures to increase access and responsible enjoyment of the river valleys, with examples.

*Discussion Point 5 Key Views and Vistas* – Are there specific views and vistas that must be protected?

- *Any policy regarding Weymouth's views and vistas should be general in nature*

NP Implications:

Recognise the policy and endorse the views/vistas in the SPNP. Include a general policy regarding development in Weymouth using SPNP as example of the kind of views that should be protected.

## **Homes Workshop (Tues 28<sup>th</sup> February 1.15-3pm)**

*Discussion Point 1 Affordable Homes* – Should the NP strive to maximise the number of affordable homes that are built? What should the priorities be? (tenure, type, location etc)

- *Need to maximise the number and proportion of affordable homes (in perpetuity) on all residential developments*
- *Strong emphasis on homes for rent (with preference for social housing)*
- *encourage alternative cheaper construction methods e.g. modular units to increase viability*
- *support community land trust*
- *include First Homes schemes*
- *promote other initiatives/solutions*

NP Implications: Policy should affirm the Local Plan required percentage of affordable homes per major development as a minimum. Require developers to discuss housing mix with the Town Council. Express preference for social rented accommodation. Promote role of CLT. Provide examples of acceptable innovative schemes/ideas, such as micro-homes, co-housing etc and identify any such projects that are in the pipeline/under consideration.

*Discussion Point 2 Key Sites in DDB and their Role* – Which are the key housing development sites within the DDB and what should the housing function and mix on them be?

- *Commercial dev and some employment sites could include some social housing*
- *Brownfield sites are better for affordable homes but have high dev costs (viability issue)*
- *Medium-rise and higher densities may help*
- *Jubilee Sidings – favoured brownfield site*
- *Ensure housing schemes add to the neighbourhoods mix of dwellings*
- *DDB may need to be extended to find sufficient land for dev*

- *Car park areas are not ruled out*
- *Avoid building on valuable green spaces within the DDB*

NP Implications:

Strong presumption that brownfield redevelopment for housing will be supported. Higher densities and medium rise developments may be acceptable (subject to design and construction considerations). Acknowledge that town centre car parks could be possible development sites (which include a significant number/proportion of affordable dwellings), subject to satisfactory alternative parking provision. Allocate Jubilee Sidings (80 dwellings) and set specific criteria; possible Design Code focus and exemplar.

*Discussion Point 3 Exception Sites* – Which sites outside the DDB may be acceptable to the community if an exception site scheme for affordable housing can be put together?

- *Exception sites should be 100% affordable*
- *Work with CLT*
- *Small scale dev will not solve the problem but will be more acceptable*
- *Don't sacrifice green corridors and important gaps*
- *Several sites outside DDB have sufficient development potential*
- *DC owned sites should be the focus if sites are to be allocated*
- *Major development proposals for some site would attract substantial public opposition*
- *Need to engage with landowners*

NP Implications: Include a permissive policy for small-scale exception sites (up to 25 affordable dwellings) adjacent to the redefined DDB on developable sites, which are not protected by other policies in the NP. Allocate sites that have been discussed with the owner and a suitable development package can be put together that maximise the number of affordable dwellings.

*Discussion Point 4 Second Homes* – Is there a case for preventing the growth of second homes or holiday lets in certain parts of the area, if so, which ones?

- *Recognise there is a problem as it massively affects the rental market*
- *Acceptance that controls are necessary*
- *Not convinced a land use policy will work*
- *Holiday lets are part of the tourism offer*
- *Increase in council tax of £19 m could be used for housing*

NP Implications: require a prime residency clause for all new housing development