

INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE KNIGHTSFORD

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXAMINER: Andrew Mead BSc (Hons) MRTPI MIQ

ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Knightsford Neighbourhood Development Plan, the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan, I have the following three questions for KPC and DC. I have requested the submission of responses **by Monday 17 February 2025**, although an earlier response would be much appreciated. All of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

Responses from Knightsford Parish Council are given in purple italics

Dorset Council has responded in green italics.

1. Date of submission to DC

Question to KPC and DC. I note from the Regulation 16 representation from DC that the Plan was submitted on 10 October 2024 and updated on 18 November 2024. Given that the Plan cover indicates that it is the October 2024 submission draft, what was the update (noting that the expectation is I am examining the Plan as submitted at Regulation 15 and consulted on at Regulation 16)?

Knightsford Parish Council response:

The front cover was amended to include the plan period (at the suggestion of Dorset Council)

In paragraph 7.1.4 the word 'However' was updated to 'Nonetheless'

Paragraph 7.1.8 was inserted with reference to the appeal decision (with the agreement of Dorset Council), and the appeal decision was included in the list of supporting documents in Appendix 1

A side-by-side comparison is available here: <https://draftable.com/compare/VzUchTQaLbQE>

Dorset Council response:

The Knightsford Neighbourhood Plan and its supporting documents were formally submitted to Dorset Council on 10 October 2024. Shortly after submission (15 October 2024), the Appeal decision Ref: APP/D1265/W/23/3317274 Land on the east side of Wynd Close, West Stafford, Dorchester DT2 8AJ was issued by the Planning Inspectorate. As this decision was directly relevant to parish housing delivery and proposed Local Green Space (WS LGS1), paragraph 7.1.8 of the Neighbourhood Plan and consultation statement were updated and the decision added to the supporting documents list. The plan period was also added to the front cover at Dorset Council's suggestion, as the plan must specify the period it is to take effect. A final version of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (November 2024) prepared by AECOM was received on 18 November 2024 concluding submission. The formal Regulation 16 consultation then commenced on 2 December 2024 with all the finalised documents.

2. Policy 12

Question to KPC and DC. The Regulation 16 representation from Nexus Planning on behalf of Woodsford Farms suggests, with reasons, the deletion of the phrase "... and would have been ..." from Policy 12.

I would be grateful to have comments from the Councils on these submissions.

Knightsford Parish Council response:

The reference to 'would have been' is used to recognise that the significance of a heritage asset may be linked to how it was viewed / perceived in the past.

The Historic England guidance note on the setting of heritage assets¹ implies the importance of considering views as they may have been (paragraph 11). The guidance uses the past tense with reference to views "where the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design or function of the heritage asset", and in another bullet makes reference to "historical associations, including viewing points and the topography of battlefields" both of which would relate to the views of that asset as seen at the past.

This is further expanded on in the box on page 10, which refers to "visualising the contribution of setting to the significance of heritage assets... [by mapping] past and present relationships between a heritage asset and its surroundings" and paragraph 27 states how "it will generally be useful to consider, insofar as is possible, the way these attributes have contributed to the significance of the asset in the past (particularly when it was first built, constructed or laid out), the implications of change over time, and their contribution in the present."

Furthermore, just because views (and the setting of) a heritage asset may have changed over time, such changes are not irreversible and can even be temporary in nature, such as quarry workings or the planting of a tree belt to screen a development, and in such cases the prior views may well be capable of restoration, and an opportunity for enhancement.

The letters from Historic England that are referenced in footnote 11 of the NP illustrate this point. They make specific mention that, when Woodsford Castle was built, it was intended to dominate the landscape – and whilst they recognise that the structure is now diminished in form and that how it is appreciated today is different from in the past, they make clear that its past feudal history is still relevant. Had how this Listed Building been viewed in the landscape in the past been irrelevant, these points would not have been made in their response and it would only have reflected on how the castle is now seen. They also note the fact that the existing quarry has a detrimental impact – including the fact that the footpaths have been diverted and trees potentially 'encouraged' to grow to screen the site – but do not use this as the basis for their assessment, referring to the guidance on when the significance of a heritage asset may have been compromised in the past by unsympathetic development affecting its setting.

As such, the Parish Council contends that how the heritage asset would have been experienced is capable of being a consideration and it is appropriate to reflect this in the policy.

¹ Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 (2nd Edition) The Setting of Heritage Assets, December 2017 <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets>

Dorset Council response:

The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition) [The Setting of Heritage Assets](#) Paragraph 9 reflects that “Settings of heritage assets change over time. Understanding this history of change will help to determine how further development within the asset’s setting is likely to affect the contribution made by setting to the significance of the heritage asset”. Paragraphs 26-31 are also of relevance as they seek to “Assess the degree to which these settings and views make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s) or allow significance to be appreciated.” In general, the current wording in Policy 12 is therefore considered to have regards to national policies and advice. Dorset Council does however have a slight concern that the wording as drafted is too rigid and would like to suggest the addition of the word ‘likely’ to this sentence. The sentence could then read “how the heritage assets are and would likely have been experienced in their immediate setting and wider landscape;”

3. Design Guidance

Question to KPC and DC. DC refers to various policies in the Plan having regard to the Knightsford Area-wide design guidelines and codes document (Design Code), developed by AECOM, and notes that there is no specific reference to the Design Code in the policy text. Potential issues may arise in introducing a specific policy seeking adherence to the Design Code, at this stage in the process, given the absence of relevant consultation in the Regulation 14 and 16 procedures.

Notwithstanding this, I agree that the Design Code deserves greater recognition in the Plan and a pragmatic approach, in the circumstance, might be achieved through an additional final sentence to the text of paragraph 4.3.3; for example: *“It is expected that proposals for development will have regard to the design guidance advice contained in the “Knightsford Area-wide design guidance and codes: April 2023”.*

I would be grateful for the comments from both Councils on the suggestion.

Knightsford Parish Council response:

The incorporation of key elements of the design code and guidance into the Neighbourhood Plan was considered to help in two aspects – to help ensure that those elements were given the weight of a development plan document, and to bring them to the forefront (making it simpler and easier to understand the critical points, given that the guidance document runs to approximately 100 pages). Having these embedded in the Neighbourhood Plan meant that was (and will be) easier to update the wording (in the case of future reviews), as the AECOM document is not provided in a format that the Parish Council can edit, and is subject to their copyright. Such updates have already happened to a small degree - for example the views included in the section 2 of the guidelines have not all been carried forward into the Neighbourhood Plan, as these required more vigorous assessment and examination. As such, whilst the two are very much aligned, there may be small differences (such as the views) where the NP is more ‘up to date’.

The Parish Council has no fundamental objection to the suggestion made by the Examiner (ie that this should be in the supporting text and not made a policy requirement) for the above reasons. However it may also be helpful to note that if there are differences between the guidance / codes and the NP design policies, then the NP policies should be given precedent.

Dorset Council response:

Given the late stage in the plan preparation process the suggested approach seems a pragmatic way forward in which to raise the profile of this important evidence base document. Dorset Council have no concerns with the wording proposed.