

Planning Report for 2026 AGM

The Planning sub-Committee has continued to meet throughout the year and has looked at the planning applications in the Society's area of interest which roughly coincides with BH21. There have been 362 applications in the year, down on previous years, and of those we have looked in detail at 138, about the usual 1/3. We have commented to the Local Planning Authorities on 10 of these applications. One was by Tesco for a site in Burts Hill which is actually in Bluebell Crescent where they claimed the store exists in what is actually open space. This has now been re-submitted with corrections!

The field at the end of Birchdale Road came up again in the year and this application was the subject of a full Planning Committee in Allendale Centre where the proposal was rejected unanimously. Will the applicant appeal again?

The year has seen Consultation on: A Dorset Local Plan, Government proposals to change the Statutory Consultation System for planning applications, proposals for a revision to the National Planning Policy Framework or NPPF. In addition to this the Town Council are preparing a Neighbourhood Plan; a process in which we are involved.

The National Planning Policy Framework is the overarching document against which all planning applications are judged. In an attempt to reduce delays caused by obtaining planning approval, the government has suggested a much more rule based approach with an assumption of approval. They also proposed removing much of the protection afforded by Green Belt status and the creation of a Grey Belt to free up more land for building.

We responded to this consultation saying that the rule based approach would mean that local situations would not be considered. For example, housing requirements would be based upon the number of households in an area – the more houses you have, the more are required. It would not take into account that Wimborne and Colehill have had a 25% increase in housing over the last 10 years with no infrastructure to support them or room to build more. Also approval would be based upon housing numbers not considering the types of housing needed. We along with many others responded to this consultation, and the government is now supposed to be considering the responses.

The Statutory Consultation System for planning applications is the method by which organisations such as Historic England and the Environment Agency are involved in reviewing applications. The government want to reduce or remove this requirement to speed up planning applications. We argued that this oversight is vital and should not be watered down but expedited by co-operation between proposer, Local Planning Authority and Statutory Agency - not just throwing stuff over the wall and waiting for a reaction. Also AI could be used for much of the initial checking of facts against policies.

Dorset like other authorities is required to produce a Local Plan which must be compliant with the National Planning Policy Framework. This is quite tricky when the government are set on moving the goalposts. Dorset produced a plan to which we and many others responded. In fact the plan was so unpopular that the Local Planning Authority and its consultation mechanism were quite overwhelmed. The consultation period had to be extended and the Council have now gone away to absorb the responses.

I think the major problem came because the housing allocations for local areas such as Wimborne were based upon the government imposed way of calculation rather than on need. To accommodate all the extra housing, large areas of Green Belt were allocated for housing, breaking all the reasons why Green Belt was created in the first place. Projected urban sprawl was inevitable. In our response we pointed out the significant increase in housing in this area over the last ten years with no concomitant infrastructure such as medical facilities and public transport. Also, there is a need to maintain the green spaces between settlements to retain their distinctiveness and as havens and corridors for wildlife.

Wimborne Town Council with the encouragement of Dorset Council are preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and the Civic Society is represented in the Steering Group. It had been hoped that a consultation document would be completed by last Sunday.

The Neighbourhood Plan must conform to both the NPPF and the Dorset Local Plan, both of which are in preparation. However, it was felt that it is necessary to articulate what we, as a neighbourhood, feel is important for our community. It is hoped that it will be able to influence the generation of the Dorset Local Plan.

We are setting out the Character of Wimborne, its important heritage and our aims and aspirations for the future. Within whatever housing requirement is imposed upon us we are stressing what is actually needed, and suggesting ways in which housing can be provided when Wimborne has almost no more space. There will be a stress on the provision of infrastructure, with an access and mobility strategy, and with open spaces for residents and wildlife. All this is necessary to create a sustainable Market Town with a variety of employment for its residents.

I would like to thank the rest of the Planning Group and assure you that we are doing our best to preserve and enhance Wimborne and its environs.

AJW