

Local Plan Options Report

The Environment and Climate Change

At Table 3.1 it states “We will take actions to minimise the impact of climate change” and this will be achieved by “managing where and how development takes place, the Local Plan can minimise the distance travelled and focus travel onto active travel and public transport options”. This is welcome, but for it to be meaningful it must be followed through in selection of development options.

Section 3.10 Environmental Performance

3.10.3. Requiring a BREEAM Communities assessment is in and of itself is meaningless. BREEAM is an assessment methodology and gives a range of assessment outcomes (unclassified up to outstanding). It is essential that the required rating is specified, ideally a high standard.

3.10.6. It is noted that the Future Homes Standard will not be implemented until 2025 at the earliest, but the plan should indicate that developers will be encouraged to bring forward designs which implement this emerging design advice, and not simply wait a few more years.

Policy ENV9: Achieving high levels of environmental performance

This draft policy is far too vague and appears to be only for large developments if based on foregoing text. All developments should be designed to achieve high levels of environmental performance and those standards need to be quantified.

Section 18 Alderholt

Some additional housing in Alderholt is both necessary and desirable. The recent growth has been about 15 homes per year, generally delivered on minor sites. Over the period of the plan this organic growth would be in the order of 225 homes.

The sustainability of Alderholt (and indeed any village community) relies on the viability of community facilities such as the Coop and Post Office, the Churchill Arms and the village hall. The pandemic has accelerated the move to on-line shopping and there is little evidence to show that this will change after the pandemic. Thus, the viability of these village facilities is best ensured by locating new residential developments where the new residents are likely to find using them attractive. DC rightly states *to reduce the impact on the climate by locating and designing developments to reduce distances travelled and minimise energy use (Table 3.1, Environment chapter).*

Option 1

It is questionable whether 300 houses in Option 1 are necessary. It is more than required for organic growth. It is disproportionate and a significant number of permitted developments already exist. A proportionate allocation of the DC housing need based on population is 247

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homes. It must be noted that there is currently planning permission granted for at least 137 houses on sites where no building has taken place. In particular the Surplus Stores site was first granted permission in 2006 and is still awaiting 89 homes to be built and permission was granted in 2017 for a further 44 homes on the Ringwood Road site. Deliverability clearly is a major issue for larger sites, while many minor sites have been developed during the lifetime of these permissions. While DC is not allowed to reduce its overall calculated housing allocation by these permitted but unbuilt houses, it can recognise that the local housing need is already satisfied.

If, however, 300 houses are to be allocated in Alderholt they can and must be on land within walking distance of the existing facilities and thereby contribute to the viability of these facilities. It should not create an unconnected community that is only accessible from Hillbury Road. This will effectively be a dormitory estate. The proposal is vague about community facilities – what exactly are these? A community of 300 houses cannot support any shops – Fordingbridge struggles to keep shops open so a new one in a slightly enlarged Alderholt is pure fantasy given the way retail trends are going. In reality all people in the proposed development will, at best, drive to the Coop creating significant extra car journeys. A round trip to the Coop is at least 3.5 km, however once in their cars residents may prefer to take advantage of the wider shopping opportunities in Fordingbridge (8 km) or Ringwood (16 km). These car journeys would be unnecessary if the Coop was in easy walking distance of the new development. It is therefore contrary to the DC stated aim of reducing distances travelled and fails to mitigate the impact on climate change.

The provision of 0.25 ha of employment land could make a difference to the employment in the village, but there is no indication of how many jobs could be created. There is of course a danger that it would just draw new car journeys into the village.

The DC documents do not identify any planning issues against the site chosen for Option 1 except that it is less than 5 km from Dorset heathland. However, their analysis fails to acknowledge its unsustainable impact on climate change due to increased car journeys. The documents identify reasons against each of the other sites offered in Alderholt (including being within 5 km of Dorset Heathland); however, such issues appear to be minor or easily solved since all of the sites have been included on Option 2.

Option 2

Option 2 is also unrealistic in terms of community facilities. Healthcare services cannot be supported in a community of this size as a minimum of 20,000 patients is the requirement for a new surgery, although some expansion of the part time surgery may be possible. Even when fully built it is unlikely that there will be sufficient children of school age to justify three new schools. The village survey showed an average occupancy rate of 2.2, which would result in about 880 children of school age. It is therefore hard to believe that schools would be provided unless they are also to meet the needs of the growing Fordingbridge community too, but they have a 2 stage system and Dorset has a 3 stage one. It talks of new retail space, but

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it is unlikely any business will actually want to open given the changing retail landscape. The significant expansion of Fordingbridge offers hope for the shops there, but an expanded Alderholt can only serve to give some support to the existing retail and will be insufficient to encourage new retail developments.

It is stated that “The newly expanded settlement should deliver local road improvements as well as improvements on the wider road network”. This acknowledges that all access roads and not just the road to Fordingbridge will need improvement. It also appears to say that the development should fund these improvements rather than DC providing the cash in return for providing a solution to the housing allocation issue. A development of this scale cannot be expected to provide sufficient funds to make adequate improvements to all of the access roads serving Alderholt and of course there are the added difficulties that 3 out of 4 of these roads are in Hampshire.

Climate change necessitates a significant switch to public transport, but this is not realistic for Alderholt. The X3 bus service runs through Fordingbridge, but cannot be rerouted via Alderholt as this would be (a) unacceptable to current users and (b) would require additional buses and drivers to maintain the existing schedule. At best a small shuttle service to Fordingbridge could be introduced to connect with the X3, but this could not properly be described as an attractive proposition. There is no realistic chance of introducing public transport for those needing to travel in any direction other than Fordingbridge and therefore this development would generate significant numbers of additional car journeys.

Why is Option 2 silent about the area allocated for employment? If Option 1 has 0.25 ha surely Option 2 will need 2.5 ha?

Sustainable Growth of Alderholt

The APC planning consultant’s report identified that 225 homes would be a proportionate allocation of the EDDC Local Plan requirement. This was broadly in line with the independent A4A analysis. It was also represented a proportionate allocation based on village population. This growth remains the same using DC population data.

Two critical issues are (a) how can this growth contribute to the sustainability of the village community and (b) how can it be done in a way that minimises its impact on climate change. NPPF remains the government policy on development planning, however, the weight given to the impacts will inevitably change. The weight given to effects on climate change will be given ever greater weight and by 2023, when it is likely that an Inspector will judge the Local Plan, it is inconceivable that it will be major factor in decision making.