

**JOINT DECISION BY THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES AND PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO HOLDERS.**

**FIXING OUR BROKEN HOUSING MARKET – THE PLANNING WHITE PAPER - CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Housing White Paper was published in February 2017 and contains many proposals which are designed to deal with what the Prime Minister calls “our broken housing market”. They include suggested reforms of the planning system, Government funding towards a variety of initiatives, suggested reforms of the way the market operates and the way in which houses are built. Local authorities are told that they have a major role to play in the successful implementation of the changes which are required.
- 1.2 The White Paper has been discussed by our three Overview and Scrutiny Panels as well as the Planning Development Control Committee. The comments that were made in these discussions have been used to help inform this joint Portfolioholder response to the consultation. Responders to the consultation are encouraged to do so by answering 38, mainly technical, questions set out in the paper itself.
- 1.3 This response starts by setting out the main comments made by New Forest District Council in our own format. It then answers the specific questions set out in the paper but only where they are directly relevant to the main interests of this Council. This is why many questions are not answered.

**2.0 VIEWS OF PANELS AND PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE.**

- 2.1 The draft minutes of the three Panels and the Planning Development Control Committee have been used to inform the response to the consultation. In particular the comments set out in our own format represent the Councillors’ views as expressed at the four meetings.

**3.0 CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, ENVIRONMENTAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 This report is a response to a Government consultation which in itself does not have any of the implications set out above. However many of the measures proposed in the White Paper would, if subsequently introduced, have a significant range of these implications for all District Councils. This is reflected in the comments we are making in response to those ideas.

**4.0 DECISION**

- 4.1 To submit the comments which are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.



## COMMENTS OF NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

### CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON “FIXING OUR BROKEN HOUSING MARKET – THE HOUSING WHITE PAPER”

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this White Paper. In doing so we have consulted with our three Council Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Planning Development Control Committee before compiling our response. The main comments of New Forest District Council are set out below, followed by responses to the specific consultation questions where they are relevant to this Council's main interests.

#### **Affordable Housing**

We have considerable concerns that the White Paper has not adequately addressed the issue of affordable housing and that as a result the Council will continue to struggle in relation to its duties to assist the homeless. In particular, the Council is concerned about:-

- Widening the scope of right to buy for registered providers and on all new housing the Council proposes to build. With high land and building costs in this area the Council will struggle to replace stock losses at a time when the need for additional affordable housing is acute.
- This Council is not opposed in principle to the right to buy but we cannot benefit fully from the receipts received and this is doubly unfair when we have had to take a large loan to buy our own housing stock.
- New Forest District Council would like to do more to help deal with the housing crisis but it considers that the policy approach taken in this White Paper is confused when it comes to Councils and registered providers being urged to do more to address homelessness issues.
- We would like to do more to build houses in rural areas but there is considerable local resistance if we cannot guarantee that they will remain available for local people in perpetuity. We will explore and encourage the role of community housing initiatives using the grant funding that we have recently received.

#### **Access to the Housing Market**

As well as the provision of affordable housing for rent the Council is pleased to encourage products which enable local people to purchase into the housing market. Through our new

Local Plan, which will enable a substantial increase of housing in this area, we will also seek to encourage starter homes and other discounted sale products. We are very proud to have achieved one of the first starter home schemes, in Bransgore, even in the absence of the awaited Government guidance on the definitions.

The importance of affordable housing to rent with good security of tenure and no unreasonable rent rises or administration charges should also be recognised as very important for the future.

### **Planning Land Supply**

New Forest District Council accepts many of the White Paper's suggestions about getting Local Plans done and reducing unnecessary red tape around the granting of planning permission. However, the housing\_delivery test responsibilities on local authorities seem to be unreasonable. Yes, we should grant permissions in a timely way and not overburden them with conditions. But, if a developer or landowner chooses not to build, surely it is not fair for the local authority to be penalised for this. There should be a better response to dealing with unreasonable land banking by developers and landowners.

Government planning policy should recognise that in some areas, such as the New Forest, where a National Park and other designations, require housing need to be displaced into non protected locations, this gives rise to significant issues both in terms of adjoining communities being asked to take more and resistance from adjoining local authorities to recognise their responsibilities under the duty to cooperate.

Whilst the drive to improve residential land supply is important it is also important to retain employment land so that communities are sustainable and can offer local, good quality employment.

### **Green Belt**

Green Belt which continues to serve its designated function should continue to be protected from development. All development should be supported by the provision of appropriate infrastructure.

### **Modern Housebuilding Methods**

A robust debate was held about the benefits of prefabricated buildings and their merits in comparison with the traditional housebuilding methods. The Council will investigate this further to establish if there is any benefit in utilising these methods for the provision of new Council accommodation.

## **ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

**Question 3 (a)** - In principle we agree that Local Plans should take account of demographics and have clear policies to ensure that the housing requirements of all groups should be met. However, housebuilders will only build the types of homes that they can deliver at a profit and so a policy to this effect will have no impact unless it is supported by Government when the local authority is challenged.

**(b)** - We strongly agree that there should be a standardised approach to assessing housing requirements and await the publication of this in early 2018. This will save much wasted time at Local Plan examinations.

**Question 8 (a)** - Yes we support the role of neighbourhood plans

**(b) & (c)** - Yes we support giving opportunities for villages to thrive and given stronger support for rural exception schemes to meet local needs. **But** this will not be achieved if rural affordable rented housing must be sold to tenants because this will create opposition to the development as a whole in the rural communities.

### **Question 10 - Green Belt**

**(a)** - Yes, Green belt is important and other options should be explored fully before such land is identified for development but this should not mean poor quality development is permitted elsewhere simply because it is not Green Belt.

**(b)** - In principle, compensatory improvement to poor quality Green Belt is a good idea but how will this work when that land is in a different ownership?

**(c)** - Essential cemetery facilities should be appropriate development in the Green Belt

**(d, e & f)** - Strongly agree. In particular neighbourhood plans should be able to define the Green Belt boundary locally.

### **Questions 21 – 28 Housing Land Supply**

New Forest District Council supports the measures to ensure that sites once granted planning permission are brought forward for development quickly. To this extent it supports changes to legislation shortening permission durations, to enable easier use of completion notices and compulsory purchase powers. However, asking developers when a site will be brought forward and factoring this into decisions on whether to grant planning permission is totally impractical and will not work.

### **Question 29**

New Forest District Council strongly oppose the idea that Councils should have to make more land available for development because developers have not brought forward existing land allocations for building. There should be serious penalties on developers for “land banking” but Councils should not be penalised by having to allocate more land.

**Question 31**

**(a)** - Yes we agree that there should be a wider definition of affordable housing to include starter homes and other sale products.

**(b)** - We do not understand how an income cap for people buying starter homes could be monitored and enforced by local authorities.

**(c)** - Yes a definition of affordable private rent housing would be useful.

We are very disappointed that there is no detailed question in this consultation which enables us to re-iterate our strong concern about the extensions to the right to buy and the issues this creates for Councils like ours which want to do more to deal with the problems of homelessness in our area. We support a balanced approach to new housing but this should include adequate affordable rented accommodation which is available in perpetuity.

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Date: