

## Background for Residents:

The following is extracted from the Draft Local Plan to help residents understand the scope of the plan: Adoption of the Local Plan will take two years.

*The draft local plan aims to focus development on those locations where the need to travel is minimised and where sustainable travel options exist, greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced. We (Dorset Council) have identified some common recurring challenges for the design code to address. These are: • Tackling climate change • Respecting local character and context within the need to make best use of land • Managing visual impact through design • The use of green infrastructure including street trees and the relationship with street lighting, the use of sustainable urban drainage systems and incorporating nature into urban areas • Integrating sustainable travel and healthy placemaking into developments*

*It will be landscape led, informed by the Dorset landscape and townscape, coastline, local heritage, and rich biodiversity. Sustainable design will be at the heart of our guidance giving clear instruction and recommendations on how we expect future development to meet these challenges.*

*Due to the scale of the development being considered, it is likely to be at least 10 years before any new homes are delivered.*

*Within the area, the towns of Bridport, Beaminster and Lyme Regis form the main centres for service provision. Growth will be focused on these centres with the aim of minimising impact and reducing the need for travel. Development at the larger villages will be aimed at enhancing the resilience of the rural and coastal communities. 3.6.4. Economic development will need to build on the strengths of each town. Bridport has a long history of manufacturing, and this continues today with several businesses working in the manufacturing sector. Alongside Bridport, Lyme Regis has significant connections with the sea both as a fishing port but also for tourism whereas Beaminster has a focus on the agricultural industry and food production. The villages in this area will support the three towns by strengthening their tourist offer and building on local skills and rural enterprise.*

One of the key changes proposed by the draft local plan is called the **Flexible Settlements Policy**. Dorset Council are proposing that where previously defined development boundaries (DDB) prevented housing development they should be relaxed. Note: Para 5.2.2 states it would involve removing existing settlement / development boundaries that are defined in the adopted Local Plans (which includes Charmouth). PC is opposed to this proposal as it would render most neighbourhood plans obsolete. Also, there is no need for this change as existing policies (current Local Plan and NHP Policy H2) allow for edge of settlement 'exception sites'. Policy H2 (in line with NPPF para 82) allows for a proportion of market homes to increase the viability of providing much-needed affordable homes.

Charmouth is a 'Tier 3' settlement with a Defined Development Boundary and has been identified for modest growth. The village has limited services and employment opportunities suggesting a focus on local employment to reduce commuting. Charmouth's Neighbourhood Plan: Emphasises the need for local employment opportunities to support the community's economic resilience. For reference, Bridport, Beaminster and Lyme Regis are defined as tier 2 settlements

**An allocation of land which could be a potential development site for c. 152 houses takes Charmouth outside of its DDB to use the land between the bypass and the Boundary wall.**

**To see the proposal for Charmouth (site ref LA/CHTH/002) go to**

**<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/appendix-a-opportunity-sites-for-housing>**

The Parish Council are aware that the Landowner of the land is keen that any development should not add pressure to the village and will be of benefit. It is not yet known what type of development is proposed as it is in the early stages of discussion and feasibility research.

**Starting on the next page is the Parish Council's response to the consultation.**

## **Response from Charmouth Parish Council to the Dorset Local Plan Options Consultation 2025**

**Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Local plan. Our response below relates specifically to the potential impact upon Charmouth and its place within West Dorset.**

**Specific development proposed in Charmouth:** The Neighbourhood Plan gives extensive details of all matters relating to Charmouth and it would be hoped that consideration would be given to all of the information in this document which was created by the community and only recently adopted.

In the case of Charmouth as there is a lack of brownfield sites, this inherently means the development of green field sites. This is partly why no sites for development were identified by the Neighbourhood Plan although the principle of developing small scale housing (ie infill and edge of settlement 'exception sites') and employment sites for local need was upheld (NHP, Policy H1-H4).

The allocation of land which could be a potential development site of 152 houses in a greenfield site causes considerable concern locally. There is lack of belief that this will be limited to primary residencies, be affordable or provide the much-needed smaller rental properties. Issues such as access, impact on village life and environment are all concerns and a development of 152 houses is not seen as modest growth. NHP Policy H3 has a primary residency policy for new homes. The PC notes that the Background Policy Paper Second Homes is considering primary residency policies at the neighbourhood plan level. PC would support this option as it was a policy receiving strong support from Charmouth residents.

Whilst the document lists concerns that would need to be reviewed / addressed, it is felt these potentially underestimate the impact a development could have visually, on biodiversity and on the infrastructure of the village.

**Charmouth:** The following is a list of current impacts on the economic and personal wellbeing of the village residents. These are interlinked with any potential development. It is hoped that any housing initiative takes into account the Future Coasts programme.

**Public Transport / sustainable travel:** Currently the bus network is completely inadequate for the needs of the area and residents for the following reasons:

- It only passes through the centre of Charmouth and does not serve the side roads of the village, or the beach. This impacts particularly upon elderly residents who cannot even easily gain access to the local shops, village events, the Drs and library, local towns or even the beach. There is a tendency for tourists to travel to the beach by car, even from the local camp sites in the village adding to congestion and emissions.
- The bus route goes via Lyme Regis and there is no direct route to Axminster for the train station. The timetable is very limited which reduces scope for workers in Exeter and for students to access the local colleges at Exeter using public transport.
- The limited early morning and evening service means that the bus does not serve the communities needs for access to activities in Lyme Regis, Bridport or Axminster. This also limits the use by out of hours workers such as hospitality and care workers.
- Very limited Sunday service again limits access to amenities and work.
- There is no bus infrastructure at all to the surrounding villages. This creates community isolation, over reliance on cars and limits the scope of employment opportunities for villagers to support the economies of the tier 3, 2 and 1 areas.
- As a result, there is an over reliance on cars with multi-car households in families which contributes to financial problems, parking issues.

- Main roads become very congested due to high reliance by residents and tourists. This significantly limits access to work, amenities such as the local hospitals and also impacts on tourism and access to the amenities.
- Any new developments would be likely to increase the car ownership / movement by at least one car per property due to the lack of public transport. 152 new homes will be contrary to the Plan's Vision to reduce our carbon footprint.
- Parking around the village is already difficult. A significant number of houses (especially in the conservation area) do not have a personal parking space/driveway/garage so parking has to be on-street. Parking for visitors (500+ car park spaces) becomes completely full at holiday times leading to visitors parking on-street. Parking becomes very difficult at peak times. Cars are becoming larger which exacerbates the space situation. (Neighbourhood plan CNP GA9.37-9.40).
- Available car parking spaces will decrease as coastal erosion increases. CNP CC10.24. There will be damage to and eventually complete loss of the Parish Council Car Park (note also loss of income to Parish). This is part of the consideration of the Future Coasts Programme.

Emissions are very high in Dorset due to the over reliance on cars. There is limited scope for sustainable travel in Charmouth due to the very limited bus service as discussed above. This needs to be addressed as we cannot tackle the issues of high emissions, social isolation and challenges on low incomes of having to own cars to get to work without the support of an integrated network of public transport serving all the villages and areas of Charmouth and connecting it efficiently to the main line station and surrounding towns.

**Employment:** Tourism is one of the largest sectors of the local economy. This is based significantly on the geological interest of the coastline with fossils being a key part of the interest, in particular due to the location of the Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre and having World Heritage Site designation. It is also based on the rural nature of the area set within the Dorset National Landscape with unusually unspoilt views across, and access to, the small field hedge lined countryside of West Dorset, extensive walks along the cliffs and the coastal environment which is so critical to the wellbeing and enjoyment of visitors and so creates the successful economy.

Due to the elderly population and the large number of second homes and holiday rentals in Charmouth, it is already underserved in terms of trades people such as plumbers, builders, electricians and gardeners, cleaners and carers. This creates a good economic situation for those workers able to live in the village but many young people training in trade have had to leave the area to join bigger firms rather than continue family legacy of trade as there are limited housing options for young people. Others in these professions who frequently work in Charmouth live outside of the area in the more affordable areas of Axminster, Bridport and Beaminster. This creates increased emissions and costs of travel for those workers.

Other employment in the area is in the agricultural and environmental fields, teachers and healthcare professionals, administrative and artisanal workers. Many people run their own businesses in other fields working from home.

It is appreciated there is a need to provide more affordable homes of all types to benefit these sectors of workers it needs to be considered that too much development will negatively impact on the economy of the area.

**Retail:** Economic challenges make running local shops very difficult and there is potential for a reduction in the numbers of shops.

Recently two retail shops have been closed, and the Post office is now a pop-up facility one day a week. One of the closed shops is now applying for permission to convert to a holiday let.

In principle, more housing could increase the footfall in local shops, provide a bigger pool of workers and help support consistent incomes, however, access to the shops is limited due to the severe lack of parking close to the shops and the lack of a bus route for those living on the minor roads on the hills of Charmouth. Carrying goods uphill can be difficult for all, not just the elderly or infirm. This leads to a tendency to shop elsewhere and for illegal parking at peak times in the holiday months.

**Medical access:** The local Drs surgery is small, and appointments are difficult to get with many having to travel to Lyme Regis Medical Centre which can be particularly difficult for elderly non-drivers who might require frequent appointments. A larger community would require better medical support.

Whilst Dorchester hospital is an excellent facility, expansion of Bridport hospital to include an accident and emergency department, specialist outreach clinics and extended open hours would significantly help to support the local community.

**Schools:** The primary school is currently low in numbers but potentially has the capacity for more children in terms of space and facilities. Staffing larger numbers could potentially be a problem if local housing doesn't supply appropriate affordable homes for teachers / staff members.

**Sewage works / water reclamation site:** The sewage works currently suffers from issues of surface water over burdening during high rain fall as most of the village has a combined sewage network. Attempts are being made to encourage separation by residents, but this is a difficult process. Whilst any new development would have to comply with Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs) it is worth noting that with rising sea levels and the location of much of the sewage infrastructure being at the lower parts of the village, challenges in the future to the system could be significant.

**Housing needs survey and population size:** There are significant numbers of second homes and holiday rentals in Charmouth. There is very little private rental available in Charmouth and house prices are high leaving very little affordable accommodation for younger people and families. It is understood that countrywide development is to comply with Government set targets and whilst there is a need to provide more homes it is considered that too much development will negatively impact on the economy of the area and could have a significantly detrimental impact on the environment.

The resident population is currently approximately 1310 in about 600 homes (of which around 26% are second homes or holiday lets). A proposal of up to 152 houses is a disproportionate population increase (30+%) which would inevitably alter the nature of the village and the community considerably, as much of the character and economy of the village and wellbeing of its residents is based on the small size of the village. Any development would need to take this into account.

The Parish Council is very aware of the housing crisis within the area and for that reason carried out an extensive housing needs survey for Charmouth with support from Dorset Council in July 2025 (full results will be available on the Parish council website in due course). This has shown the need for 30 properties with a local connection. Of these 15 are one bedroom, 11 are two bedroom and 4 are three bedroom. The survey also shows a larger 'preferred housing need' (people with a less direct local connection who may be from neighbouring parishes but would choose Charmouth as a location). Again, this was mostly small to medium properties.

The housing needs survey has not shown the need for as many as 152 houses. There has not been shown to be any requirement for larger houses.

This emphasises that the actual need in Charmouth is for a small-scale development and indicates the biggest need is for small affordable properties including rental being the most popular options helping to provide much needed homes for local workers and young families.

The need also does not need to be fulfilled by a single development if other small-scale plots can be found. Preferred options for Charmouth have been identified as brownfield sites and small scale in-fill.

**Alternative options to building on Greenbelt:** The aim of many of the planning regulations is to ensure a thriving tourist economy. However, whilst this economy is essential the balance has gone in favour of holiday properties with insufficient housing to support this economy. It is suggested that many of the already existing properties could be better used to support the housing shortage, for example:

- There are properties in Charmouth with 10-month only occupation restrictions. Many of these are not in use as holiday rentals and remain empty and would make very suitable small properties if the 10-month restriction could be relaxed where a case for permanent occupation could be made.
- Many second homes remain empty and are not in use. Specific support given to owners to lease properties might encourage more rentals. More accurate figures on the extent of second home and holiday home ownership would help guide strategies.
- Help given to people to divide current larger properties into multi-occupancy homes to enable live in care / multi-generational occupancy.
- Help given to self-build on small plots to create local use small properties.
- Conversion of pre-existing outbuildings to enable low number occupancy (singles / couples) rather than restricting these conversions to holiday let use.
- It is suggested that more research should be undertaken to identify other plots of land which could fulfil the housing needs.

It would be hoped that any housing development would consider options such a Co-housing development / Community Land Trust initiative.

**Local character and the Neighbourhood Plan:** As Charmouth has developed organically over many years it has a vast array of different styles (NHP section 8). Therefore, the proposed site allocation does not meet the requirements of the Plan (para 4.2.10) for organic growth of settlements without having a significant impact on their character. The context of the potential development site is such that it will be very visible from the rear of many properties on the Street which forms the main part of the conservation area, especially those at the top of the Street and from the bypass. For this reason, it is key that the visual impact is in keeping with the conservation area. It is assumed that any and all development would consider the extensive information on housing type, form and layout already covered by the Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan (in force until 2035) which reflects the views of the village and was approved by the village and adopted in March 2022. A summary of relevant information from the CNP is given below:

The potential development site identified in the draft Local Plan has previously been dismissed on several previous occasions by Dorset Council under SHLAA.

#### **A) The Old Priory Wall**

- i) The mediaeval wall known as The Old Priory Wall (referred to as The Wall hereafter) creates the northern boundary of the village, running behind the buildings on The Street, then up behind buildings on Old Lyme Hill. Such a wall is almost unique in the UK. CNP HH4.3 CNP Table 4.1 entry H1
- ii) The majority of these buildings are Listed and/or in the Conservation Area
- iii) The listing for a Listed Building includes its curtilage. Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 any object or structure within the curtilage of the building that has been part of the land since before July 1<sup>st</sup> 1948 is treated as part of the listed building. This means that even if a structure is not fixed to the building, it is still considered part of the curtilage and may require listed building consent for alterations or changes. (Historic England)

- iv) This implies that each part of the The Wall (or the side walls of each burgage plot) should be considered as Listed.
- v) Approaches have been made to the Listing Authority to request the listing of The Wall as a complete entity. (Dept of Culture, Media and Sport on the recommendation of Historic England).
- vi) Whatever may happen, a wide strip of green land must be left alongside the full length of The Wall in the hope it will remain recognisable as a unique part of the Parish and almost unique in the UK
- vii) Consideration of development with respect to the above: see CNP HH4.10 to 4.14 inclusive, plus CNP Policy HH1.

## **B) Views / amenity**

- i) CNP NE6.36 notes that under the Planning Application Requirements April 2019, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is required, and explains why.
- ii) CNP NE6.32 to 6.37 inclusive gives further information on the importance and significance to this area
- iii) CNP Policy NE2
- iv) Pages 49/50: relevant views E and F
- v) As you drive along A35, and looking down from Morcombelake, the view south is of fields with a long wall at the top which has a church tower and assorted roofs poking above it. Were the fields to be developed this character could be lost.

## **C) Access to the area**

- i) There are a number of lanes/driveways leading north from The Street towards the area in question, only one providing public access through The Wall (Barrs Lane). Each lane is only of single lane width, generally with Listed Buildings / burgage walls on either side. The whole area is part of the Conservation Area. CNP NE6.33.

**“Potential site” issues:** The following applies to any and all proposed development but specifically addresses concerns over the potential site identified in the draft Local Plan:

The potential site would be in Greenbelt land and within Dorset National Landscapes remit. It would require extensive measures to be taken to compensate for the loss of this land and to hide any development from view. Extensive landscaping of shrubs, hedgerows and tree cover would be expected to be part of the remit of any development. This would also be essential as part of the noise mitigation for new housing.

There is a large amount of wildlife locally including hedgehogs, adders, slow worms, dormice (shown in surveys on the periphery of the village), many migrating birds and often rare birds sighted and many species of bat. Great crested newts are known to be found very locally in Morcombelake. It is hoped that development would include scope for enhancing the habitat for all species. Bat friendly lighting (this is known to be a bat corridor), swift bricks, hedgerow-and similar mitigation would be expected to be included in any build. This could potentially help increase biodiversity.

**Protection of the river:** Whilst SUDs would be part of any development, it is hoped that the remit would go beyond planning requirements to include extra measures to ensure protection of the Monkton Wyld Stream which is an important tributary of the River Char. The Monkton Wyld Stream has been shown by the River Char Action group to have significant high levels of caddis fly showing it to be a very clean watercourse (riverchar.org). A Rights for Rivers Charter is in the process of being finalised and submitted for adoption. The proposal states *“Overall, there are no major constraints to development with regards to flooding & surface water drainage”*. Urban run-off from any development will inevitably enter the stream and could harm water quality. Mitigation ponds / willow and reed beds could be constructed which would help promote biodiversity, provide a pleasant area, mop up potential pollutants from run-off and help

alleviate flooding downstream. Whilst the area is not a designated sensitive site it is hoped the build would be phosphate neutral to ensure the Monkton Wyld Stream and the Char are not negatively impacted on. For future water resilience it is also hoped water saving measures such as using grey water flushing, rain gardens and other water capture are built into the design to help reduce water consumption (helping residents to have low bills) and to reduce pressure on an already overburdened sewage network.

**Healthy placemaking:** it is hoped that any build would take into account the needs of new occupants to ensure ease of integration into the existing village and its amenities/services and to ensure the residents co-exist in a positive way. Good quality internal insulation between housing to reduce noise impact and adequate parking and outdoor / garden space would be essential.

Noise from the bypass could be a problem for occupants –consideration should be given to reducing the road to 50mph as this would help and would benefit the current residents of Charmouth.

Renewable energy: it is assumed that any new development would be based on renewal energy – solar panels, air source heat pumps or similar to keep bills low for new occupants and reduce global warming.

**Access:** the potential site shows an access point from the main Street. It is assumed this is just shown as the ownership boundary as this **would clearly not be a realistic route**. Charmouth currently suffers from lack of parking places, partly due to the multi-car ownership and the amount of tourism and there can be considerable congestion in the summer with many cars parking illegally to use the shops. That section of the Street is also a particularly difficult part of the street for cars to work around each other.

**Continued development:** There is considerable concern that the Flexible Settlements Policy would set a precedent for overdevelopment of Charmouth beyond the capacity of the facilities and amenities to support and with a significant detrimental impact on the wellbeing and economy of the current residents and the tourist industry.

Relaxing the DDB to enable such a large number of houses to be built is felt overall to be unsustainable and potentially detrimental to the village character and economy for all of the above reasons.