

## **Interim Rural Housing Planning Policy Consultation Explanatory Note.**

Consultation commenced 17<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Consultation expires 30<sup>th</sup> May 2009

**Purpose of consultation:** to consider the interim rural housing policy, which aims to deliver sufficient housing sites to ensure **at least** a 5 year supply and to monitor and manage the provision of housing land. The policy will form the basis of the relevant part of the Joint West Northamptonshire Core Strategy. The policy will be a material consideration in determining new planning applications in our district, until the 5 year land supply has been achieved, so it is important that the council understands the contents and implications.

**Parish council briefings are to be held on Monday May 11<sup>th</sup> between 10.00am and 4.00pm.**

### Background

The council is formulating its new planning policy documents. These will eventually form the local development framework, which replaces the old local plans. Until the local development framework is adopted the council will consider planning applications by reference to some of the old local plan policies and to this interim housing policy. The interim policy will not form part of the new development framework but it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The “saved” local plan policies are:

- H3 – residential applications in built up areas in Towcester and Brackley normally permitted.
- H4 – certain permissions Ok within Deanshanger, Middleton Cheney and Old Stratford.
- **H5 – small groups or conversions or infilling normally Ok within Restricted Infill villages. Bugbrooke is restricted infill, also Gayton, Rothersthorpe and Kislingbury, Pattishall and Nether Heyford.**
- Permission not normally granted in the restraint villages except in certain cases. N/A Bugbrooke.

The interim policy aims to promote a flexible approach to managing housing supply. In section 4, it states that the existing village confines will be in place until at least 2012, that the focus on development will still be on Towcester and Brackley, with village development being permitted if there is local need. It does, however, state that away from larger urban areas, development should be concentrated on “local service centres”. These are larger villages with more employment and services, which mean that people do not have to travel far to access schools etc, and they are seen as being more “sustainable”. Bugbrooke would come within the definition of a local service centre.

### Housing requirements and supply

South Northants is part of the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Area. The planning strategy for this area requires 330 new dwellings each year between 2001 and 2021, plus possible further housing to contribute towards the growth required for Northampton, which has to expand by 40,000 dwellings by 2026.

There is also a requirement for a 5 year land bank. Studies have shown that there is a shortfall of 1.73 years in this land bank, and this has to be made up. The consultation document says that this would need 740 additional dwellings to be consented (without the Northampton contribution). The Towcester expansion is not included in the 5 year figures because of the uncertainty of delivery within this time, neither is a proposed large scheme in Brackley.

### Implications of the shortfall

Government housing policy PPS3 states that where there is a shortfall, councils are under a duty to consider planning applications favourably. This does not mean that consent has to be given regardless. The council must still consider whether the site is appropriate in accordance with the other provisions of PPS3. The parish council must be prepared to consider any applications with this policy in mind. In particular, PPS3 states that a local authority should not automatically dismiss an application because it is premature, or that it is contrary to existing local plan policy.

The document states that it is likely that pressure on Greenfield land will increase because developers will want to keep costs down and Greenfield land is cheaper to develop than brownfield land and is therefore more profitable. Councils must give precedence to brownfield development.

Backland development is difficult to resist. The council has to be able to demonstrate that it has an adequate rolling development programme to enable backland development to be refused.

### Sustainable villages

The consultation document states that locations of new rural housing developments will follow government guidance in being concentrated in “sustainable villages”. These are larger villages, with services sufficient to benefit additional dwellings. A points system has been devised to decide which villages are the most sustainable, and Bugbrooke is 4<sup>th</sup> on the list. It is therefore likely that some new development will be focussed on Bugbrooke. In considering any applications, the council will take the following into account:

- Brownfield sites will have priority
- Must be within or near enough to the existing boundaries to form a logical extension.
- Should contribute to the 5 year shortfall (i.e. no landbanking)
- Provision of relevant affordable housing
- Evidence to be provided on environmental and community impacts
- Compliance with the saved local plan policies H3 – H6

The village confines will still exist but will not necessarily be a limit to development.

Developments will have to begin within the 5 year timeframe so as to reduce the housing shortfall.

There are 3 options for SNC to adopt in delivery of the required housing:

1. Continue the existing local plan practice of not specifying the number of dwellings appropriate to a development (it just uses “small scale”). Each application would be considered on its merits and using the criteria set out above. No targets would be set.  
This would be flexible, but could result in inappropriate scale of development, either from one scheme or from a build up of several schemes.
2. Set a target for development. This would be based on the size of the villages, and for the most sustainable villages, including Bugbrooke, it would increase the village by 10%. The new dwellings would be built on land adjacent to the existing confines. The figure for Bugbrooke would be 111 (one hundred and eleven ) dwellings. These are in addition to developments within the village confines, and these figures might be increased if the circumstances are right. SNC considers that the advantage of this option is certainty, and would prevent overdevelopment in the smaller villages, but there might not be suitable sites in a village, it might restrict future land from coming forward and might be less likely to satisfy the 5 year land supply.
3. Identify appropriate sites coming forward as a result of this consultation. This would be led by SNC with liaison with parish councils and landowners. There would also be the opportunity for developers to put forward sites. The consultation documents states that the advantages of this option are that it allows for community involvement, and it provides a more realistic basis as to the scale of development for each village. The disadvantages are that there could be too much development (as for option 1 above), it would be time consuming, and speed is needed because of the shortfall, and it takes no account of the size and “sustainability” of the villages.

### Affordable Housing

The threshold level is likely to be reduced from 15 to 8 dwellings. The proportion of affordable housing to be supplied might increase to 50%. Sites outside the village confines might have hope value for market housing (as opposed to affordable) owing to an appeal decision on land at Potterspurty. This would undermine the present policy of keeping such land for affordable housing, as exception sites.

### Conclusion and observations

1. Bugbrooke is seen as a sustainable village and is therefore vulnerable to new development adjacent to the existing village boundaries. This is in addition to new development within the village confines. If Option 2 is chosen, there could be up to 111 new dwellings earmarked for the village between 2009 and 2013. If either of the other options are chosen, the figures might be different, but perhaps 111 dwellings is in SNC’s view as acceptable for Bugbrooke?
2. Northampton is also required to provide more housing, and the above figures are separate from any housing which might be imposed as a result of this expansion.
3. Should a strategy be devised whereby Bugbrooke works with the other most sustainable villages and reasonably sustainable villages to ensure a consistent approach and share best practice? Not necessarily Mid Northants parishes, which have a different agenda.
4. Resurrect the development working party?

5. Get some advice as to the best approach from a planning consultant?

**West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document**

**Consultation Started:** 9<sup>th</sup> April 2009

**End date :** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2009

**Subject:** provision of affordable housing in West Northants. Once adopted, this SPD will be used by councils in West Northants, including SNC in deciding planning applications where affordable housing is involved.

Councils might increase the present affordable percentage threshold to 50% of all new dwellings in rural areas, and to 40% in urban areas of SNC. Affordable housing is presently required on all sites where more than 15 units are being built. This will be reduced in rural areas and will start at 4 units. For numbers between 4 and 14 units, 25% affordable housing will have to be provided. Some sites, known as exception sites, are those which are on land which would not otherwise be permitted for development. On these sites, only affordable housing will be permitted. These sites must still conform to the normal planning criteria for access etc. They must be kept as affordable in perpetuity, and people will not be allowed to staircase to 100% ownership.

The tenure split in rural areas is suggested as 60% rented and 40% intermediate, such as shared ownership. This might be varied in individual cases where the developer can produce satisfactory proof that the standard percentages would not be viable.

Affordable housing should be pepper-potted throughout the site in small groups. It should meet certain quality standards.

Affordable housing should be provided on the site to which it is relevant, unless the developer can produce a good reason for not doing this. In such a case it will have to be provided elsewhere in West Northants. In rare cases a financial contribution in lieu might be agreed.

Delivery of affordable housing and the performance of the housing associations managing it will be reviewed annually.

There are briefing sessions intended, but no dates are given in the document.

4<sup>th</sup> May 2009