

Sway Parish Council's response to the NFNPA Local Plan Review initial 'call for views' October 2015

Introduction

Sway Civil Parish is entirely within the National Park and includes the defined village of Sway. Sway Parish Council are grateful to the NFNPA for their strategy of consulting with parishes on many policies; and in this particular case would also like to thank David Illsley and Deborah Slade for setting the scene with their presentation and discussion session at one of Sway's recent meetings.

The NFNPA "Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD" [henceforth the Core Strategy] of December 2010 has a lot of merits and took balanced cognisance of the issues of the time. However with changes of government policy, some unintended consequences, efforts to get around the rules, and more recent pressures, it is now due for an update.

In 2013 Sway's Village Design Statement was approved and adopted by the NFNPA as a Supplementary Planning Document, after extensive local consultation – including over 500 questionnaire returns. Since then as part of a Housing Needs Survey a further questionnaire on current priorities for Sway residents has been issued with a similar response rate – and the results were summarised independently. Given these and other extensive consultations, Sway Parish Council feel confident that we have strong evidence of the priorities of the local residents – who comprise some 10% of the entire population of the National Park.

In the current Core Strategy we particularly applaud efforts to limit development, to limit gradual suburbanisation, to preserve Sway as a New Forest Village (with appropriate retail and commercial activity) in a countryside setting, and to maintain a stock of smaller dwellings. We have been pleased to see efforts to support tranquillity, the quality of the adjacent SPA, affordable housing, local small businesses, biodiversity, trees and hedgerows, community facilities and heritage assets. And we appreciate policies to manage the difficult balances involved in: recreational horse keeping, pollution of all kinds, camping and caravanning, surface water disposal, parking spaces, the land based economy, property boundaries, and the 400m zone. These items are all strongly supported in the survey of what residents feel makes Sway special, and the priorities areas where residents want to see Sway Parish Council encouraging improvements. The Sway VDS is well known to the NFNPA and attached is a brief independent summary of the results of the recent "Your Parish Council" survey.

As a result of the current Core Strategy, Sway remains a pleasant and highly desirable place to live – residents appreciate that and want to encourage vigilance and policies that will allow that to continue.

However there are a number of consequential issues – either intended or unintended - which have been evolving and we would include in these:

- The defined village of Sway (much of which is within the 400m zone) is now getting quite crowded – it is transforming slowly from a New Forest Village to a Hampshire Town. The unlimited extensions allowed within the defined village (except for 'small dwellings') has meant that many plots are now crowded, garden grabbing now means that virtually the only green spaces are the school playing field and a couple of small public open spaces. That which has not been covered by extensions is often tarmacked or paved or accommodates outbuildings.

- This increase in development has resulted in many more larger houses in Sway, and few smaller dwellings – and although it may not be a material planning consideration there is also an increasing strain on infrastructure and surprisingly little increase in the total rateable value of the housing stock.
- Within the civil parish, but outside of the defined village many properties have been extended to their 30% allowance, but then massive outbuildings are being allowed in the larger curtilages, permissions for which then defeat the DP11 intent. The results often appear as urban citadels within a rural setting.
- Whilst the PDCC members are to be applauded for taking a strong line over maintaining small dwellings, even these are more gradually disappearing – from unauthorised loft conversions, the addition of outbuildings, the result of appeals, and similar.
- Outbuildings and agricultural buildings are being used for residential or business purposes – again resulting in an intensification of development and strain on the infrastructure. Some outbuildings are being changed into residential by stealth after 10 years, with no way of preventing this from happening.
- The target of 50% affordable housing within the defined village, and exception sites outside, is not being met.
- Sway is losing precious retail space to housing development as much of it is outside defined shopping areas.

On balance we feel the benefits of maintaining a defined village (but updating the differentials between defined village and outer parish) are greater than abandoning that hierarchy. The current defined village of Sway is now suburban – approaching urban - so if government targets demand substantially more housing it is difficult to see how this could be added within the defined village. If we were to abandon the defined village concept and allow development in the outer parish on an equal footing there would inevitably be indiscriminate sprawl. We could consider increasing the boundary of the defined village but we feel that will just extend the suburban area with little control over affordable housing or smaller dwellings.

Given all the foregoing we would suggest that the new Local Plan should consider:

1. The NFNPA being more encouraging of any substantial increase in housing being in adjacent urban and suburban areas (outside the Park) where infrastructure is far better; in exchange for the Park continuing to provide a tranquil extensive green area for the benefit of visitors from those adjacent areas.
2. The NFNPA should lobby infrastructure providers, on behalf of Park residents, to explain that without their support any government targets for increased housing will result in major problems.
3. Extending the right to buy to housing association properties should be resisted within the National Park because of the difficulty of using any funding thus raised to build more affordable housing within the National Park.
4. Maintaining the Sway defined village at the current boundary; modifying the rules within the defined village in line with the Sway VDS: to discourage boundary to boundary intensive building with impermeable hard surfacing.

5. Adjacent to the defined village allowing development at specific agreed sites and controlling that development by conditions to include affordable housing and also smaller dwellings (even at market price). This is already anticipated by the 'Call for Sites' going out in parallel to this consultation.
6. Introducing some sensible limits on the extent of outbuildings (perhaps as a percentage of the floor space of the dwelling) and the concomitant automatic removal of further permitted development rights. Also adding a policy which would prevent outbuildings automatically becoming residential after 10 years.
7. Renewing and adhering to targets for: affordable housing, building within the 400m zone, retention of retail and commercial units, small dwellings, and other targets covered in Chapter 10 of the current Core Strategy. To encourage small dwellings consider allowing one larger dwelling being allowed to be replaced by two much smaller ones, in preference to one that is even larger.
8. Even if they are not material planning considerations, perhaps some specific guidance could be considered concerning: camping and caravanning, private events (e.g. with marquees etc.), parking, use of outbuildings and agricultural buildings, drainage ditches, soakaways, impermeable surfaces, fences, walls & gates; invasive species & native species; encouraging biodiversity; maintaining the local heritage; the impact of development work, and similar peripheral but increasingly sensitive matters.
9. Encouraging people to make use of the free pre-application advice service; and encouraging people to report possible enforcement issues in confidence.
10. Providing clear guidance (with diagrams) on the ownership, maintenance responsibilities, planning limitations and neighbourliness of roadside verges, ditches, hedges, soakaways, impermeable surfacing and property boundaries.
11. Continuing and expanding the enforcement work – without which we do not need a Local Plan at all. To be consistent and serious about challenging unauthorised development.
12. Not being scared of appeals – given our already excellent record of winning appeals and the fact that the Planning Inspectorate decisions are not at all consistent we should vigorously defend our Local Plan, and make it clear that that is what we will do.
13. Taking great care not to reward misdeeds – TPO trees being felled should never make way for development; retrospective applications should never be granted just because the development has already taken place; unauthorised temporary development should never lead to permission; so called 'non-expedient' enforcement items should be carefully considered in case they set a precedent – better to have such infractions nipped in the bud so as to discourage further contraventions.
14. Extend DP7 restrictions on change from retail use to include sites outside the defined shopping areas.

So in respect of the views sought in the “Your views” box on page 6 of the initial ‘Call for Views’

- 1) Overall Sway Parish Council agree with the identification of the key planning issues but would want to see some changes of emphasis, as detailed herein.
- 2) Sway Parish Council see no further fundamental key issues that should be included.

Our further comments on the numbered issues (and paragraphs) are as follows

Issue	Comments
Natural Environment section	
4.11	Fails to note the sensitive zone within 400m of the SPA.
1	The overarching key issue.
2	To particularly include the 400m zone around the SPA.
3	To include the continuing monitoring of agricultural ties.
5	This is particularly important: one minor change may appear trivial (to a Planning Inspector for instance) but the cumulative effect is increasing suburbanisation – especially within the defined village.
6	To include the effects of hard landscaping increasing water run-off, soil erosion and local flooding.
Built Environment section	
4.17	In order to bolster a Local Plan, the NFNPA should continue to support and adopt Village Design Statements and consider doing the same for Neighbourhood Plans.
1	Taking cognisance of VDSs and the Design Guide SPD.
2	The Sandford Principle of protection taking priority must be paramount.
3 and 4	This is a refreshing approach which we applaud – in Sway we’ve sometimes seen development allowed when there is significant damage to local heritage.
5	In Sway we have had no development of more than 5 units for many years – so all policies relating to larger developments are unlikely to be significant.
Communities section	
4.23	An average of 24 new dwellings per annum have been built between 2006 and 2014, compared to a target of 11; so the NFNPA has consistently been allowing more new development of dwellings than the requirement.
1	From the Sway Housing Needs Survey the needs within our Civil Parish are for affordable housing and smaller dwellings for those with strong local links, and policies should be adapted to encourage such provision.
2	Local support for affordable housing is strong, provided that the priority really is for those with the strongest connections with the local area.
3	Vide supra. Sway suggest keeping the defined village and the existing boundary, but modifying the rules for inside the defined village to limit further suburbanisation. Further development should then be in allocated/selected sites just outside the boundary of the defined village, but only on condition that affordable housing and smaller dwellings are a major part of any development (of whatever size – three adjacent 5 dwelling developments really do look similar to one 15 dwelling development). Outside of the defined village some control over outbuildings is urgently required.
5	This is an essential key issue – and Sway feel this needs to be carefully considered as part of the new Local Plan.
7	Sway already has over 31% of the population aged 65 or over – well above even the NFDC average, see http://www.newforest.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=23525&p=0 and we imagine this proportion will increase; so provision for the elderly local population is vital, a specific section on this and dementia-friendly planning should be considered as part of the new Local Plan.
8	Such a review is important, but if such contributions apply only to larger developments (of more than 5 dwellings) then we are dismayed, because we do not imagine there will be many such larger developments in Sway.
Local Economy section	
4.31	Whilst average household incomes are high – even in comparison to the South East; average house prices are proportionately even higher, so housing affordability is poor.

4.32	Says the main business constraints include “ <i>poor transport links, including the local road network, coupled with insufficient provision of public transport.</i> ” Sway agree with this analysis and would like to see further support for better local public transport. It is disappointing that the NFNPA has supported the summer tour bus for visitors, but not supported the local CANGO bus service for local residents.
2	There may be a confusion between correlation and causation here – we do not feel that low unemployment has any causal relationship with a diverse local economy – it may well be that a desirable place to live and high house prices attracts employable and fully employed professionals to the area.
3	As well as the conversion of offices to housing; resisting the conversion of outbuildings, commercial, business and retail property into housing should also be a matter of policy in the Local Plan. This should also include retail premises that exist outside "defined shopping areas".
4	Again: this should be with the Sandford Principle – the basis of National Parks - foremost in our concerns.
5	Efforts to try to support local farming – including supporting the New Forest Marque – should be enshrined in our new Local Plan. Examples of diversification should be provided (and not include large scale solar PV installations, which as the PDCC agreed are industrialisation rather than diversification).
6	Encouraging flexible working and home working is laudable, but not at the price of large new offices being built as outbuildings (and perhaps later converted to housing).
Transport and Access section	
1	That compelling justification within Sway Defined Village in particular being the congestion and dangers that lack of parking has brought to the central area (around the railway station and shopping frontage).
2	In recent wide scale surveys of Sway residents speeding is one of the highest priorities for action.
3	Sway rights of way are remarkably poorly networked and hence underused, so we would support this as a key issue. Whilst small scale local and family cycling are supported, large commercial, timed, events are not.

‘Your Parish Council’ survey responses

A housing need survey was conducted in November 2013; the main purpose of this survey was to identify demand and support for a small affordable housing scheme for local people in Sway parish. An additional section (Part 3: ‘Your Parish Council’) was also added to the survey as the parish wanted to find out resident’s views about other (non-housing related) issues in the parish.

As a non-Sway resident and the person who conducted the survey and collated the results, it was agreed that I would be best placed to provide an objective summary of the results of Part 3 of the survey form ‘Your Parish Council’. 474 households responded to the survey (please note that not all answered the questions in Part 3.)

What further services or provision would you like to see provided by Sway Parish Council?

The results show that residents have different ideas about what additional services and provision should be provided in Sway.

The services and provision residents would like to see are as follows:

	Respondents
Support in clearing ditches and trimming hedges	195
More road safety measures	176
More support for older people	134
A Parish Council annual report on how money is being spent	132
Support for more musical and cultural events	115
Improved quality and provision of green spaces	101
Parish Council newsheet	93
More allotments	56
Internet café	47
Extend summer playscheme	43
Planning clinic	41

Other additional services and provision residents would like to see include:- cheaper allotments - car parking - fixing potholes - more things for young people to do - improved lighting - better bus service - improve tidiness of village - local help with internet - enclosed area for dogs - toilets in village centre - clearing surface water on roads - review of meeting room availability requirements - bus shelter - more signage - sustainable ecological plan – childcare - notice board - better paths - improved drainage - road safety for animals - pedestrian crossing - cycle lanes - modernising the village hall - parking restrictions in village centre - apprenticeships for local people

The three main priorities for residents in Sway Parish are:

- 1. more road safety measures**
- 2. support in clearing ditches and trimming hedges**
- 3. more support for older people**

74% of survey respondents think that the Parish Council's current precept (council tax) of £28.60 per annum (for Band D households) should stay the same. Some respondents did not think that the majority of the precept should go towards the Jubilee Field.

60% of survey respondents know who their Parish Councillors are and 64% consider themselves well informed about current activities in the parish. 34% of respondents are aware of the Parish Council website.

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