



## New Forest District Council Spatial Options and Policy Direction – Regulation 18 Local Plan

This public consultation is open until Friday 20 March 2026 and is a structural proposal of how the District Council may move forward. The contents are proposals only and will be shaped by consultation responses.

The document below is a summary only, and members are urged to read the main document in full before responding. Please use this link <https://www.newforest.gov.uk/localplan>

The questions posed are numbered by NFDC and I have retained these, although they are not all present due to this document being a summary.

### **Introduction**

The previous consultation, Issues and Scope ran in 2025 and engaged around 200 members of the public, plus social media interactions. All authorities are required to have an up-to-date plan and review it every five years. It must remain relevant, showing the potential growth areas, identify type and location of development, and ensure these are covered by adequate infrastructure of all kinds (schools, transport, health care etc). Of the three areas that the local plan covers, New Milton is within the 'South Coastal Towns and Villages' region.

Despite Local Government Reorganisation and a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in the wings, central government are urging all planning authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan, so the work must continue. A decision on Local Government Reorganisation is expected from central government in the coming few months, with shadow unitary forming in 2027 and fully operational by April 2028. The new NPPF include reforms on how to plan for housing, infrastructure and climate change. It is expected that if the draft Local Plan is submitted before the end of December 2026 it will be tested against the current NPPF.

Following this consultation, NFDC will refine the options on policies and development site allocations and include thorough assessment of the ability to provide sustainable infrastructure for new homes so that new residents needs are met. As part of consultations the District Council are working with Hampshire County Council, Town and Parish Councils and neighbouring authorities, plus all infrastructure providers. Final draft proposals are expected this Autumn. It will then be submitted for Public Examination. It is hoped that if found sound, it will be adopted by the District Council by next winter.

The evidence base for the proposals will be released when finalised. Documents already available include Habitat Regulations Assessment Scoping Report, Housing Needs Assessment, Indoor Built Facilities Strategy and an Interim Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.

### **Draft Vision and Plan Objectives**

The draft vision has detail on certain locations and how they are likely to change between now and 2043. It looks at economic, social and environmental factors that are in line with national policy on sustainable development and these six main themes

- Meeting the housing needs of all
- A vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy
- Tackling the climate and ecological emergency
- Healthy, safe, strong and inclusive communities
- An enhanced natural and built environment
- Attractive, accessible and thriving places

There are 13 topics to help achieve and support sustainable development, which include accessibility to community infrastructure, biodiversity, climate change adaption/mitigation, Communities (supporting all age groups in improving access to services) economy and employment, housing, transport, landscape and historic environment, There are also a number of themes that present a particular challenge or create conflicting priorities. To help guide decisions they have been defined as

- PEOPLE – affordable and accessible housing for all, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, education and skills
- PLACE – safeguarding National Park with sensitive development, heritage protection, design and placemaking, green infrastructure, safeguarding wider landscape character
- PROSPERITY – Town centre regeneration, employment and innovation, digital and transport connectivity, tourism and culture
- CLIMATE AND NATURE – Net zero by 2050, nature recovery and biodiversity net gain, flood risk and coastal resilience, tree planting/green design
- CONNECTIVITY AND INCLUSION – integrated transport networks, accessible development, equitable infrastructure investment, digital inclusion

### **QUESTIONS (plus drafted responses)**

- 1) **Does our draft vision align with how you would like the District to be as a place to live, work and visit?**  
*The document paints an ideology that will not be realised as even if the District Council are able to allocate enough sites, we have limited confidence that the utility providers will ensure that capacity is increased so conditions for our current residents is not compromised.*
- 2) **Do you think we have chosen the right priorities for the Local Plan? Yes.**
- 3) **Do you have any comments on the published evidence base studies that support our Local Plan? No.**

### **What development do we need to plan for?**

Housing need – The government requires all authorities to calculate housing need on a ‘standard method,’ which is set out in Planning Practice Guidance at paragraph 4. The current standard method for the district **including** National Park is 1,511 dwellings per annum. As NFDC policies do not align with the NF National Park policies, an alternative method can be used which is closely based on their ‘standard’ one, and this is scrutinised at Examination stage. For the method, existing housing stock, local house prices, earnings and housing affordability have been considered. This reduces the per annum figure to 1,254 for the Plan area alone (NFDC area). Over the plan period this equates to 22,572 more dwellings which is more than double the existing requirement and six times the recent average for the plan area.

A review of existing large sites (over 10 dwellings) has been conducted and some sites removed, however the existing site allocations take the Plan Area total need from 22, 572 to 15,737 by 2045.

Future sites are divided into Strategic Development Growth Options (5,850 dwellings), potential sites outside defined built up areas (680) and inside the built-up areas (217). The appraisals on option sites are considered realistic for delivery, and further sites in the northeast and southwest plan area have already been discounted. It is highly likely there will be a Plan period shortfall of 8,910 dwellings despite NFDC robust efforts. The District Council will seek to set housing requirements with any Neighbourhood Planning body as work takes place on new plans. The need for land is not just about housing, but commercial floorspace, community and leisure, education, open space and health facilities also, so presents a significant challenge. The Employment Needs Assessment identifies a gross floorspace need of 142,600sqm.

### **Sustainable Spatial Strategy**

The previous consultation highlighted the need to prioritise brownfield and infill sites, plus growth distribution. Some felt development should be scaled according to existing settlement size, others that all sizes should be considered and main settlements should take the more significant extensions. Higher density development for larger towns was suggested, but ensuring character is not lost, and a need to focus on infrastructure and service provision.

There are some options regarding the distribution of growth, with the most appropriate likely to be a combination of two or more, see below with summary of pros and cons

New Milton (Including Barton on Sea) is Tier 1 with Fordingbridge, Hythe Village, Lymington, Marchwood, Ringwood and Totton. These are considered the most sustainable due job accessibility, amenities, public transport and a range of community services. Tier 2 includes Everton, Hordle and Milford, Tier 3 includes Sopley.

### **Option 1 – Development focussed on the towns and villages at consistent scale with the adopted settlement hierarchy**

This would mean development focussed on towns (tier 1 settlements) and villages (tier 2 and 3) For the towns this means sites of 50 dwellings or more or 2500 sqm of floorspace. For tier 2 and 3 it is 10-49 dwellings or 500-2500 sqm of floorspace. This could offer up to 1,927 dwellings (in addition to existing supply of 6,835).

### **Option 2 – Large expansion of the towns**

Site options of 500 dwellings or more, this would produce 2,500 dwellings for New Milton and the other towns named above. It may conflict with biodiversity needs, transport and landscape but provide well for community provision and the economy. Masterplanning would need to incorporate green infrastructure as a priority. This option is considered balanced subject to more detailed assessment.

### **Option 3 – Large expansion of both the towns and main villages**

This option would see sites of 500 or more dwellings for the towns and 50 or more for the main villages. This would contribute 4,120 dwellings. It has mixed sustainability outcomes with negatives on climate change, landscape, biodiversity and transport. Again, green and blue infrastructure would need to be master planned as a priority and may need off site measures. This would have positives for inclusive community and local service provision, plus employment and the economy.

### **Option 4 – New settlement(s)**

One broad area has been identified but further detailed assessment is required before it can be taken forward. This would provide 700 dwellings and could combine with option 1 (1,927). Negatives include landscape, climate change, transport and biodiversity with the need to prioritise green and blue infrastructure. Uncertain effects with water and soils that need further investigation. Community provision and the economy are again cited.

### **Option 5 – Larger scale development at the small rural villages including Cranborne Chase National Landscape.**

Sites of 10 or more dwellings would have negative impacts on the national landscape, climate change and transport, plus

significant effect to biodiversity. Effect to water and soils are unknown at present. Wider distribution of growth offer possibilities for the rural communities including maintenance of village services, local employment and the economy. It will help the vitality and demographic of these rural areas.

The adopted Settlement Hierarchy is being reviewed to inform the Local plan draft.

The potential strategic approach is for Built up area boundaries to have defined lines on the Policies map so there is clear separation from the surrounding countryside. Within the line, development would generally be acceptable subject to other Local Plan policies being applied. Outside of the line, the primary concern is to conserve and enhance the countryside and development would be limited to that required for agriculture, reuse of existing buildings or tourist accommodation, new residential dwelling in accordance with rural exception site policy and other restrictions, which seems entirely appropriate.

**QUESTIONS (plus drafted responses)**

**6) Do you agree with the broad spatial options for distributing and accommodating development growth within the plan area? In general, yes.**

**7) Do you agree with the approach taken to our spatial development strategy? Yes**

**8) It is likely that a combination of options will be needed to meet local housing needs. What combination do you think is the most appropriate and why? Options 3 and 5, as the largest in terms of expected housing numbers and sustainable location, with the addition of growth distribution for the smaller villages. Option 4 seems the least attractive due the amount of disruption for a fairly modest number of dwellings.**

**9) Do you agree with our proposed approach to the settlement hierarchy? Yes.**

**10) What are your views on the potential approach to defined built-up areas and development in the countryside. Entirely appropriate.**

**Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGO)**

The NPPF states that large amounts of new dwellings are more achievable through larger scale developments, such as significant extensions or new settlements. Key to this is quality design and location, supported by genuine transport options and other infrastructure. The District Council have identified 15 SDGOs, based on sites promoted by developers or landowners to the Council, or have previously been identified. These sites are considered to accommodate over 100 dwellings. These are NOT site allocations, simply options to be considered. Some parts have not yet been formally put up by the landowner, and the District Council are making contact. There is no obligation, it depends entirely on the landowner. Other uses may be required such as commercial floorspace, school etc dependant on the size of site and further assessment required. Infrastructure providers are already in discussion with the District Council to ensure these sites are adequately provided for by improvements to transport, managing congestion, local jobs, provide habitats etc. The final version of the Local Plan (due this Autumn) will provide detailed policies on infrastructure provision and site-specific policies, supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan and updated Community Infrastructure Levy.

At this early point, all sites are assessed regardless of Green Belt status, will require a Habitats Regulations Assessment and Natural England consulted, who state robust mitigation measures must be in place. Much greater detail will be required on each SDGO to conclude if suitable, available and achievable. The ones affecting New Milton are –

**SDGO J (New settlement) land around Downton**

- **Approx 2,500 homes, market and affordable, mix of tenure**
- **A village centre with convenience shopping, community centre, education and health. Currently no primary school and work with BCP regarding secondary capacity**
- **Assess impact on nearby coastal towns**
- **Impact on Green Belt, conservation designations, priority habitats, Listed Buildings**
- **Highway network improvements**
- **Significant green infrastructure such as a country park, plus recreational and public open space**
- **Consider effect on road capacity and bus services, in combination with developments at Hordle, Everton and Lymington – possible improvement need**
- **Partially in a Mineral safeguarding area**
- **Promote/deliver enhanced biodiversity and improved carbon sequestration near Danes Stream**
- **Employment land suitable for office/industrial use**

## SDGO K Land west of New Milton

- Around 1,200 homes, market and affordable, mix of type, size and tenure.
- Community focal point such as local convenience shop, community centre, flexible business use floorspace
- Ensure connected to services and facilities by non-car travel
- Assessment of local traffic impact, Highway network improvements
- Primary and/or secondary education facility
- Significant green infrastructure, natural greenspace and public open space
- Impact on Green Belt, conservation designations, priority habitats, ancient woodland, Listed Buildings
- Improved habitat connectivity and carbon sequestration along Walkford Brook and woodland.
- New or improved bus services, utilities connections
- Employment land

There are further sites in Ashley (south side of Hare Lane, stretching north towards the Infant school), another that straddles the boundary, north west of Noah's Arc Farm, and the south west corner of the Fernhill roundabout. There are no estimations of dwelling numbers for these.

### **QUESTIONS (plus drafted responses)**

**11) Do you agree with the potential Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGOs) we are considering as options? Please explain your reason and note which of the SDGO areas you are commenting on specifically.**

*SDGO J – land around Downton – The housing numbers for this site seem minimal given the potential impacts of the new settlement.*

*SDGO K – We are expecting a great number of constraints on this land parcel but think each can be appropriately mitigated.*

**12) What do you think about the other potential development sites that we are considering as options?**

*These land parcels, numbered 55, 61, 13, 169 and 135 appear well located. However, we feel that with the impending Ashley Manor Farm development, the Ashley based ones could cause considerable difficulty for residents and the road system.*

### **Homes For All**

Consultation responses on the Issues and Scope elements –

The need for more affordable homes for younger households and a wide spectrum of other housing is required to enable older residents to live well and independently.

There is a perceived surplus of retirement housing, and smaller units for the elderly are required as not all can afford this type of housing.

Increased density was also suggested for the larger towns, with location specific policies so higher affordable housing targets for the places in greatest need.

It was generally viewed that the housing being provided now, is not affordable for local residents.

The Housing Needs Assessment conducted in 2025 shows an acute need for social and affordable rented housing. It requires maximising delivery of affordable housing, prioritising social rented; adopt flexible housing mix policies; support delivery of specialist housing for older people and those with disabilities; address unmet demand for self and custom build plots.

From the most recent census, there are just 1,200 properties as second homes so there is no justification for a restrictive policy.

**Policy HOU1** to be updated – requiring a mix of homes by size, type and tenure which reflects needs identified by best available local evidence and/or specific housing needs, including for younger people, older, multi-generational families, custom and self-build or those who require specialist housing.

**Policy HOU2** – currently sites of 11 or more dwellings are to aim for 50% affordable housing. However, some of the strategic sites have been unable to provide this due to viability issues. This policy will likely require sites of 10 or more make on-site provision subject to viability. A Whole Plan Viability Assessment will inform developments, to ensure that social rent housing is prioritised. The Local Plan review will include considerations for this policy as there is no justification to increase the target, due to the current viability issues.

There will also be revision of other housing related policies such as HOU3 (Specialist Residential Accommodation) HOU4 (Gypsies, travellers and travelling show people) HOU5 (Rural housing exception sites) and DM21 (Agricultural or forestry workers dwellings).

**QUESTIONS (with drafted responses)**

**13) What are your views on our approach to providing homes for all? Justified.**

**14) Do you agree that the Local Plan should provide a mix of homes, including affordable ones for younger people, more options for older residents and those with additional needs including disabilities? Yes.**

**15) Should our affordable housing targets be the same throughout our plan area or vary by location or size of site? Vary by location due to the need to house those with a local connection.**

**Biodiversity, Local Nature Recovery & Ecological Enhancement**

The Local Plan will be structured on the aims of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which was introduced as a requirement of the Environment Act 2021. Specific ecological enhancement measures are already being incorporated beyond the Ecological Enhancement Schedule so that new development features the needs for swift nesting, hedgehogs, bees, bat roosting etc. Response to the Issues and Scope consultation made it clear that continued protection and enhancement was required, including wildlife corridors and the need for swift bricks and bat boxes. The 10% BNG target on major new developments (10+ homes) was viewed in a polar way, with some wanting a higher target and others none at all. Some suggested that development including minimal extensions should have a BNG requirement. The Environment Agency has suggested explicit comment within policy on the aquatic environment and the role BNG has in improving water quality, management of rivers etc. The renewed policy direction will require a minimum of 10% BNG (which is now statutory) and should be delivered on site. Only if demonstrated this is unachievable should off site measures be considered.

**QUESTIONS (and drafted responses)**

**18) Do you agree with our ideas for protecting and enhancing nature? Yes.**

**19) Do you agree with our proposed policy approach for green and blue infrastructure? Yes, the expectation to implement additional features is necessary.**

**20) Do you think our proposed policy approach will help protect and enhance the natural environment and contribute to improving community wellbeing and public health? Yes.**

**21) What are your views on the proposed approach to BNG? Should the Local Plan encourage developers to exceed the statutory 10% requirement? Yes.**

**22) Should we include a policy on rivers and watercourses to address the impacts of development on nutrient neutrality, pollution control and surface water runoff? Is there anything specific you would want to see included within this policy? Yes, this is worthwhile particularly with the cliff erosion in this area.**

**23) What are your thoughts on developments including features like wildlife corridors and nesting boxes? These are most necessary and should be a condition on permissions.**

**The Green Belt**

The South West Hampshire Green Belt covers 21% of the plan area, being 5,181 hectares. It adjoins the larger green belt areas of Dorset. The Issues and Scope consultation responses showed the value placed on it, with potential use as parks or recreational space rather than development. Others felt small scale development might be acceptable. The Green Belt has been regularly reviewed with poorly performing land removed to provide land for development. The government has now defined that boundaries can be reviewed under 'exceptional circumstances' and this includes unmet housing need. Criteria for the new 'grey belt' has been provided, and given the unmet housing need the District Council are required by national policy to review the Green Belt. 'Golden rules' have been provided by government and include the need for high levels of affordable housing and appropriate infrastructure improvement. The sequential approach to development is brownfield first, grey belt then Green belt. A new Green Belt Assessment has been commissioned, to identify the weaker elements that could be considered Grey belt. The new National Planning Policy Framework sets out clear guidance on this and stipulates alteration must meet the identified needs in full.

**QUESTIONS (and drafted responses)**

**27) To meet future housing needs the District Council may need to review extent of the Green Belt. Are you satisfied the council has considered all reasonable options for meeting local housing need before releasing land from green belt? Yes, based on the review document recently commissioned.**

**30) Do you think that applying national planning policies that protect important natural/semi natural areas, like national parks, nature conservation sites, or places with special environmental or heritage value, could prevent or limit development in the District? Yes, and rightly so.**

**High Quality Design, Landscape and Placemaking**

**Placemaking and Landscape** - Sustainable and vibrant places to live need to start with a diverse mix of uses and supportive connections for those that live and work in them. They need to reflect character of the surroundings, promote wellbeing and foster social interactions. This follows national guidance including Manual for Streets. A good range of appropriate scale, size, density, design and landscape focussed layouts provide the characteristics with BNG providing the additional habitats and support. The Issues and Scope responses stated that higher densities may be appropriate and assessed on a site-by-site basis. This however should not be at the expense of the environment, character or wellbeing. Evidence to support this is within the NPPF and a new Landscape Character Assessment and others will help underpin the policy moves and inform the selection of potential development sites. Policies SO1, 2 and 3 will be strengthened to include green infrastructure, densities that are responsive to character and capacity of the area.

**Design Quality** - These designs create a mix of building and landscape features that have a strong sense of place, user friendly public spaces, styles that compliment local character, mixed use, with high accessibility to jobs and transport infrastructure. Revisions to policy ENV3 will include not just new development but 'significant alterations' and include new development to adhere to nationally described space standards, plus the emerging Design Codes and integrate sufficient cycle and car parking spaces so that realistic needs of residents are met in a manner that is not prejudicial to the character and quality of the street, highway safety, emergency access or pedestrian convenience.

**Relationship to Design Codes** - These documents give a clear vision to developers of what is expected in terms of look and feel, aiming for high quality sustainable development. It is expected that engaging in these rules early helps developers understand what is allowed in an area and prevent buildings from being out of place. The requirement for the document has come from government and follow a framework set nationally, having flexibility in regards the geographical need to be prescriptive. Design Codes are now considered a primary tool in development quality improvement (this once was Local Distinctiveness Studies). Despite Design Codes being made in Neighbourhood Planning areas, the government has stated that all Planning authorities should prepare a design code for their whole plan area. National Planning Practice Guidance allows authorities to require the meeting of minimum internal space standards as set out in the Technical Housing Standards (2015). This is not a building regulation and will sit wholly within Planning, being regularly updated.

**QUESTIONS (with drafted responses)**

- 31) Do you agree with our approach to design and creating attractive places?** Yes.
- 32) What features matter most to you?** Character, realistic parking standards, space standards and landscape led layouts.
- 33) Should we allow higher density housing in some areas?** Yes, where need is evidenced.
- 34) How should we use Design Codes to guide development? How can we involve local communities in this to ensure new places reflect local aspirations and character?** Require development to have pre-app discussion. If no pre-app for a new house, strongly suggest a refusal unless contents of Design Code are adhered to.
- 35) Should the Local Plan set minimum space standards for new homes? If yes, what should this be and should there be exceptions?** Space standards should be guided by the proximity to other development and will help uphold elements of character. The exception should be on affordable housing as might be a viability point, meaning residents sit on the housing list for longer.
- 36) Are there particular locations or types of landscape features you think are especially important to safeguard or improve?** The Town Centre. Any site in or adjoining the Old Milton Green Conservation Area. The Clifftop.
- 37) How important is it to include parks, trees and water features in new developments?** Incredibly important, to achieve well designed spaces and provide a strong sense of wellbeing for residents.

**Climate Change and Environmental Risks**

The District Council are committed to help developers take all reasonable steps to decarbonise buildings, reduce construction embodied carbon and create developments that are adapted for climate change. This means making changes to structures, practices, systems and processes to ensure building resilience for future generations. The Local Plan will also aim to improve community resilience by careful management of flood risk and coastal erosion. A focus on sustainable travel via the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan plus Local Transport Plan will also be strengthened. This is sought from government via the NPPF.

With increased events of flooding and coastal erosion threatening homes, tourism and infrastructure, heatwaves and air pollution increase health risks, it's noted that the demographic with ageing population and vulnerabilities, there are pockets of deprivation outside the National Park that will be heavily affected.

**Flood risk**

The main sources of flooding relevant to the area are fluvial, coastal, surface water and groundwater flooding. Other sources include overwhelmed sewers and drainage systems. Hampshire County Council are the lead authority on flooding and responsible for managing local surface water drainage, with Environment Agency managing strategic reduction from flood risk of main rivers. The NPPF makes planning authorities take flooding as a strategic priority within Local Plans.

The Issues and Scope responses showed great concern for appropriate drainage solutions to help mitigate the downpours. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment informs spatial planning and development decisions.

Settlement	Tidal/fluvial risk	Surface water risk	Groundwater susceptibility	Reservoir Inundation Risk
New Milton/ Barton-on-Sea	Areas within zones 2,3a, 3b, historic flooding; defences protect against 1 in 25-year fluvial events	Risk along watercourses and roads	Potential for flooding below ground level	None.

**Coastal Change**

There is no statutory duty to perform Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management, but subject to funding the District Council works with partners to manage it. This section highlights the four policy categories (Hold the Line etc).

The NPPF states that Local Plans should outline what development is appropriate and make provision for development and infrastructure that needs to be relocated away from a Coastal Change Management Area. The evidence collected from existing plans such as the FCERM, shows that there is increased pressure under the future climate scenarios, reinforcing

the need for proactive approach. The specific policy will be revised to be more prescriptive and include the need for a Coastal Change Vulnerability Assessment in some cases, plus make provision for subsequent relocation of vital services and community facilities.

### **Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency**

To provide just 50% of the Districts energy needs will require great investment in solar farms, wind turbines and energy storage so there are a number of land use implications that may challenge existing priorities. Robust evidence is essential with spatial planning to guide the transition. Broad areas will be identified in the Local Plan which may be suitable for renewable energy generation. The respondents to Issues and Scope consultation felt that residential roofs and public buildings should hold solar panels, with all types of generation considered so long as character and environment not compromised. Agricultural land was considered not appropriate but small modular schemes, biogas and tidal energy capture suggested. Wind turbines were the most controversial. This is from the government's requirement for planning authorities to design policies maximising low carbon and renewable energy, without quota. It also requires the plan to encourage developments to draw energy from decentralised, low carbon or renewable supplies.

The policy direction will be that NFDC supports and encourages renewable energy generation in locations thought appropriate (having been assessed), aligning with Neighbourhood Plans so that the local community are heard and specific areas identified. There will be a presumption in favour of buildings designed with clean/renewable energy and lower emission systems in mind. This also includes sustainable transport infrastructure, EV charge points and active travel. High efficiency systems and retrofit will be encouraged.

### **Supporting Economic Growth and Local Prosperity**

The Local Plan aims to provide a strong quality and quantity of sites for dwellings and businesses that provide local employment and skills. Key locations are to be identified and assessed for need, plus protect current sites that function well. Growth of the rural economy and tourism should be environmentally appropriate. The Issues and Scope consultation responses advised that there is a need to provide opportunities for employment that would reduce people travelling out of the area on their commutes. Smaller industrial estates were suggested for relocation or integration to larger ones, to provide land for housing. These changes could provide greater prosperity and sustainability, plus investment to the area. The NPPF states policies need to be flexible, but plan for sufficient provision of commercial, retail, employment and leisure sites. The Local Plan needs to ensure the aims of the Industrial Strategy published by the government in 2025 are represented.

The District Council publication 'Economic Profile of the District 2022' shows that compared to Hampshire and the rest of the UK, the New Forest has a small highly skilled workforce proportion with low paid industries in the main - marine, land-based, leisure, care and hospitality being the most prevalent. 97.7% of the businesses in the District are either categorised as micro (less than 10 employees – 86.1%) or small (10 – 49 employees – 11.6%).

Through the Economic Needs Assessment, around 25,790sqm of office and 116,810sqm of industrial floorspace is needed. The South Coast Towns area that New Milton sits in has approximately 13,589sqm currently and the Needs Assessment shows 46,350sqm will be required, therefore 32,761sqm needs to be identified through the Local Plan process. This is the greatest deficit for the whole District Plan area. The NPPF requires a clear strategy for sustainable economic growth.

The Policy approach will need to retain key employment sites, and encourage more higher-value, knowledge-based businesses, working with partners to ensure transport infrastructure is robust and promote development of vocational training, business incubation, flexible spaces and conference facilities. Alternatively inward investment could be sought for a large-scale development, but this may be constrained by environmental criteria. Both will be assessed on the Sustainability Appraisal. The potential SDGOs may include suitable employment land if allocated in the Plan, dependent on balance with housing and other suitability criteria. Policy ECON2 will be updated to reflect the need from the NPPF, protecting existing appropriate sites and identifying new ones.

### **Approach to town and local centres**

Responses to the Issues and Scope consultation show eagerness for the authority to be active in reducing vacancies, plus reducing rates, providing free parking, pedestrianisation, better transport and creating improved seating and access to green spaces. There was also support for empty units to become residential.

The NPPF requires a hierarchy of town centres, promotion of their viability and vitality and making clear which uses are acceptable. New Forest District centre average vacancy rate is 7.1% (2024) and lower than the national average of 13.9%. A Retail Needs Assessment will be commissioned to inform policy decisions. The policy direction will be to maintain and regenerate where possible. Policy will define shopping frontage boundaries as well as town/village centre boundaries. All development should be appropriate for its location and not affect character, viability, or vitality of that village/town centre.

### **Approach to tourism**

The National Park, being a major tourist attraction brings many visitors to the surrounding towns for overnight stays and supporting services such as cafes and restaurants. The coastline also provides a draw for tourists. The Local Plan will aim to provide the right mix of tourist accommodation and other facilities, in the right locations. The Issues and Scope consultation noted that tourist provision was considered adequate, although the history of the area could be highlighted further. The greatest desire was to protect the area from second homes and Air B&B's. The area supports 9,000 local jobs and creates £491,000 million per year with over 15 million visitor days in the Park each year. Policy approach will be to encourage appropriate tourism and visitor provision; retain and enhance serviced (hotels) and non-serviced (campsites) accommodation; maintain and enhance facilities; enhance visitor appeal of coastal environments and improve quality of recreational opportunities and managed access (includes Barton), supports car free tourism.

**Questions (with drafted responses)**

**43) How should the Local Plan seek to meet the identified need for business land/floorspace? Are there business sectors we should focus on? As this document states, pair business land for professional use with the housing land within Call for Sites process.**

**44) Do you agree with our proposed approach to retaining existing employment sites? Yes.**

**Do you think there are circumstances where we should allow redevelopment or alternative use be considered? Where the business is closing down it could trigger an assessment of greater need for that area, rather than having an empty unit of particular use class for years to come.**

**45) How should we encourage use of local employment in new developments? Are there any measures that would be most effective in supporting local skills?**

**48) How do you think the Local Plan can best support vitality and viability of town and village centres? Are there particular uses, improvements or initiatives to be prioritised? Adequate food retail choice, other retail and cafes etc. To create a policy that halts over dominance of one type of retail i.e. Nail bars, vape shops, estate agents as this stifles a good mix of offer to draw visitors.**

**49) Do you agree with the proposed approach to supporting tourism and visitor facilities? Yes.**

**Planning for and Delivering Infrastructure**

This can be broken into 3 types –

- Physical – needed to connect homes and businesses to transport, waste and utilities for day-to-day needs;
- Green – to feed ecosystems that support human and wildlife, including blue infrastructure;
- Social – to give communities the necessary for effective functioning such as affordable housing, education, healthcare etc.

The aim of the Local Plan is to secure provision or contribution to social and physical infrastructure to manage impact of new development, which should be located considering existing communities and services. Development should only be permitted where there is sufficient capacity or with a plan for new/improved facilities. This includes green infrastructure. The Issues and Scope consultation gathered great concerns about capacity, particularly that for GPs, dentists, schools, drainage and water quality. The NPPF states all plans should align growth and infrastructure of all kinds and set out contributions needed without undermining the ability to deliver. NFDC will continue to work with the agencies providing such infrastructure. Provision is made under the following : Planning obligation under **Section 106** of the Planning Act – secures delivery of measures through legal agreement with landowner/developer; **Community Infrastructure Levy** – charged according to floor area of new development or **Section 278 of the Highways Act** – if alterations to the highway are required for the development. The NPPF determines planning conditions should be kept to a minimum and necessary.

A new Infrastructure Delivery Plan will show what is needed to deliver the Local Plan strategy, when it is needed and how much it will cost. A draft version is currently available as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.

Phased works for infrastructure is imperative both for the existing community and new development. The policy approach will ensure all developments provide or contribute proportionately, with on or off-site provision towards facilities, affordable housing, habitat mitigation and public open space considered necessary. The policy will seek to retain existing services such as education, health, social and other community services unless the service will be provided in another way following a review.

**QUESTIONS (with drafted responses)**

**50) What are your views on the proposed approach to existing infrastructure and the provision of new infrastructure? The approach seems reasonable.**

**51) What types of infrastructure (physical, green/blue, social) do you think should be prioritised to support new development? Social, green then physical. This is because we are in a large town that has taken a great deal of development over the last 40 years, and some of the 'social' infrastructure is breaking down.**

**52) What approaches would you support to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth?**

**53) How can we best involve local communities and service providers in planning for and delivering the infrastructure needed to support new development? For the public, provide short quiz type engagement in doctors waiting rooms or in local markets, as consultations can feel impenetrable to busy working households.**