

## Dronfield Neighbourhood Plan: Submission Draft

Dronfield Civic Society **supports** the Dronfield Neighbourhood Plan.

It is well-presented, clear and easy to read and understand. It accurately represents the views of residents gathered through a comprehensive, inclusive engagement process. Objectives and Policies are clear, well-defined and well-related to the main issues and views of residents.

The Civic Society, which has a planning remit within its constitution, was invited to assist during the early stages of the plan process and made particular contribution to the chapter about heritage.

The Aims and Objectives, set out on page 8 of the Plan, are supported. We support the emphasis on protecting and, wherever possible, enhancing Dronfield's green and open spaces, conserving Dronfield's identity and celebrating the town's heritage. We feel that all these areas are compromised by the current iteration of the NED Local Plan.

Whilst the DNP was criticised at the earlier consultation for non-compliance with the strategic policies in the NED LP, the findings in the Interim Report on the NED LP by Planning Inspector Sarah Housden, have demonstrated that the DNP more accurately represents what she views as being appropriate for Dronfield. This relates to policies about Green Belt, the number of houses and size of housing developments and the Callywhite Lane Extension or Regeneration Area.

We agree with the DNP in supporting the continued designation of the countryside surrounding the town of Dronfield as Green Belt. This recognises the importance of landscape character and local distinctiveness. It aligns with what residents want and value and it concurs with the view of Planning Inspector. The removal of one Green Belt site (DR2) allocated for 200 houses in the Local Plan, to retain openness and respect important views and vistas is in line with the policies in the DNP. It also aligns with the views about the importance of the Green Belt for settlement separation, the preservation of the natural environment and the Moss Valley Conservation Area.

The reduction in size of the Shakespeare Crescent site (DR1) for smaller scale development means that the Inspector has seen fit to reduce Dronfield's allocation from 475 dwellings in the NED LP to a figure somewhere around 160 dwellings over the plan period based on half the land area of DR1. (The land area indicated by the Inspector is actually much less than half of the 9.88 hectare site, so presumably less than half of the 235 houses) The de-allocation of this site in its entirety recognises the need to maintain the integrity of settlements like Unstone.

A policy to prevent any loss of GB as in the DNP will strengthen resistance against developers seeking unreasonable land-take for profit at the expense of the countryside. The DNP is more closely aligned to national policy with regard to the protection of the Green Belt through the new NPPF. We therefore support this statement in the Natural Environment section of the Plan: "The Plan supports the continued designation of the countryside surrounding the town as Green Belt, with a strong presumption against development that would conflict with its openness". We note also the statement on page 14 of the Plan: "The primary purpose of the Green Belt is to "prevent coalescence of Chesterfield and Sheffield and to maintain the integrity of settlements in between".

The development proposals in the Local Plan for the Shakespeare site would not have met this purpose.

In the Community Assets section of Themes and Policies, on page 10, we support the concerns of the community in relation to health and education services. Increased housing allocated in the Local Plan for Dronfield definitely risks overburdening those services. We find it disappointing that Dronfield Station is not listed as an Important Community Asset. The Station is valued by many people in Dronfield, although we note that the Station garden is listed as a Proposed Local Green Space.

In the Housing and Infrastructure section of the Plan, we support the Plan's aspiration to prioritise development on brownfield sites, before any greenfield and Green Belt land, which echoes core planning principles in national policy.

We agree with the DNP in terms of windfall development as being the way that Dronfield can grow sustainably. Opportunities like the former Gladys Buxton School site, approved for demolition in June, should be prioritised as an affordable housing location before any alteration of Green Belt boundaries and land take. The DNP is correct in its assumption that future growth can be accommodated in this way with a degree of confidence in the availability of future windfall sites and we support this strategy. Small windfall sites within the SDL should be prioritised and brownfield sites have been put forward to NEDDC which have not been fully considered or allocated.

We also support development which provides the right mix and scale of housing, to meet the needs of Dronfield's population. The DNP presents an accurate picture of the type and mix of housing that is required for Dronfield during the plan period to cater for elderly residents, to provide more starter homes and to provide more one and two-bed dwellings. This should take precedence over the Local Plan which allocates Green Belt sites on the edge of town, with extensive countryside views, at low density, on land with steep slopes which suggests suburban estate development of detached houses on large plots which is unlikely to be the sort of housing Dronfield needs. The DNP seeks to restrict urban sprawl into the countryside and we support that.

We strongly support the statement in the Plan that "It is imperative that development provides suitable infrastructure to cater for both immediate and future needs". The Local Plan is inadequate in the area of infrastructure and the Inspector is requesting more detail about the costing and deliverability of the Callywhite Lane/Green Lane junction and the Bowshaw Roundabout prior to any large scale development as allocated in the LP.

The DNP has recognised that the historic street pattern in the town is struggling to keep pace with the levels of traffic now upon it. It would be detrimental to current residents if this was increased at the levels proposed in the LP. The DNP has highlighted the need for improvements to junctions before the town can accommodate any further development and we support this.

This section of the Plan also covers sustainable transport and notes that Dronfield, the only town in North East Derbyshire with a railway station, has the highest potential for sustainable transport in the District. The Plan should, therefore, be supportive of improved rail links from Dronfield, North (to Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester) and South (to Chesterfield and Nottingham) and improved bus

links to the station and to neighbouring towns and cities. This would lead to a reduction in car journeys and, therefore, emissions.

There is a degree of weakness in both the LP and the DNP with regard to the proposals for the regeneration of the town centre. We feel that much is merely window dressing. There should be policies to improve the market offer and reduce the number of charity shops. Dronfield's rich heritage could rejuvenate the town centre particularly with improvements to the public realm from The Forge up the High St to the Manor House and this should be part of the Regeneration Framework. We would be very happy to work with Dronfield Town Council on a heritage-led regeneration of the town.

It is noted that, on page 32, relating to Chesterfield Road and Dronfield Bottom, the Plan states: "The road can be seen as an important visual front for the town. Improving the quality of signage and commercial frontages would have a positive impact on the appearance of this area." We agree wholeheartedly with this statement, yet enforcement is weak and policies are lacking with regard to shop front design, colour, appropriate signage and style, with some businesses letting the area down badly.

The Business and Employment chapter on Page 34, mentions the proposed extension of the Callywhite Lane Industrial Estate and the various problems associated with that. The DNP does not support further expansion of the Estate. We support this view and note that the Inspector, in her interim findings on the Local Plan, seems to agree. Any extension to Callywhite Lane, would exacerbate the problems of congestion with more HGVs through the bottleneck of Dronfield Bottom close to the town's Secondary School.

We very much support the Themes and Policies set out in Heritage and Design section of the Plan. We need to be ever vigilant to developments which threaten the heritage elements of our town. In relation to our three conservation areas, it is important that the District Council does carry out a review in accordance with their statutory responsibility. Character Appraisals for each Conservation Area should be updated. The DNP Heritage and Design chapter fully represents the value the community places on the town's historic buildings and Conservation Areas. There is a clearer indication than in the NED LP what and where those features are and how to manage change appropriately. The Inspector in her Interim Report has stated that there has not been enough value attached to the Moss Valley Conservation Area in the LP because of the inappropriate allocation of the DR2 site whereas the DNP demonstrates and promotes the town's heritage and environmental assets by retaining the current Green Belt boundaries.

The Transport and Access section of the Plan sets out clearly the issues surrounding the inadequacy of the transport infrastructure of the Town. It is less clear about what is to be done about the current problems, particularly around the High Street and Church Street. This is an area where the Town Council could take a lead in creating a safer environment, particularly for pedestrians.

The DNP is an excellent document. It is well-written, well presented, scoped appropriately, configured for lay people, clear and supported due to an inclusive engagement process. It accurately reflects the key issues and what is important to residents of Dronfield without political bias. The

DNP should be adopted because it is now more aligned to the Inspector's Interim Report which implies that modifications to the NED LP will be required for soundness before adoption can take place.

Dronfield Civic Society Statement 21/03/2019