

MICHAEL TOMLINSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Drew Mellor
Leader BCP Council
BCP Council Civic Centre
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth
BH2 6DY

16th March 2022

Dear Cllr Mellor,

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond formally to the consultation on the BCP Local Plan ahead of the deadline of the 25th March 2021. I would be very grateful if this would be taken to constitute my formal response to the consultation.

As you know, there is widespread concern from my constituents about some of these proposals. As a result, I have written to numerous constituents who live in the areas which will be most affected by the proposed plan. It is important that this consultation reaches as many locally affected people as possible and I am aware that a number of residents have also been in touch to express their concern. I have at all times encouraged my constituents to respond directly to this consultation.

I have set out my concerns below. I responded similarly to Dorset Council, during their Local plan Consultation last year. For consistency, I will repeat many of my concerns as they are equally relevant to Merley & Bearwood in my constituency.

I strongly believe that the Green Belt should be protected and alternative sites, outside of the Green Belt, should be sought and prioritised. Locally, the Green Belt serves as an important environmental asset for wildlife and for local people. Significant development has already taken place locally and it is therefore vital that the remaining Green Belt is protected.

The policy of the Government is that brownfield sites should be prioritised. This is something that has been repeated at a national level. Despite the challenges that you mention, this must remain as a priority. The Government has made it clear that building on the Green Belt should happen only in exceptional circumstances. It seems to me that unless and until all other avenues have been explored, that high barrier and that high test has not been met.

There are several sites within the Mid Dorset & North Poole constituency that are Green Belt sites. I urge BCP Council to do all that it can to protect the Green Belt and find as many sites as possible on brownfield sites. These concerns are held by many constituents. The communities in Merley & Bearwood have expressed their concerns about several sites that would substantially reduce the buffer between these two important and distinct areas. One of the primary purposes of the greenbelt is to maintain this buffer. In addition, sensible concerns about the impact on open space, wildlife and infrastructure have also been raised with me. I know that these considerations will also have been raised through the consultation process and I look forward to the Council taking these concerns into consideration.

Member of Parliament for Mid Dorset and North Poole

I raised very similar concerns with Dorset Council about the communities of Wimborne and & Colehill. I raise these areas again as there is an undeniable link between Wimborne and Merley. They are neighbouring communities but must be allowed to retain their distinct identities, this will be impossible if continual erosion of the Green Belt around Merley is permitted.

In the consultation document, you ask a general question about increasing density and height in the built-up areas, to meet housing requirements. I support this principle, especially if it is to offset any further proposals for Green Belt development.

The document also highlights many sites within the Green Belt that have been promoted by land owners. In particular there are several large sites in and around Merley, Bearwood & Canford Magna that have been proposed for inclusion by landowners. These sites should not be considered for development and should be discounted at the earliest possible opportunity. Residents living in these communities deserve the certainty that the Council will not accept development of this scale within the Green Belt. This is especially important given the development that has already taken place. This would do tremendous damage to this area.

Away from the principle of development, another issue that has been consistently raised with me is infrastructure. Previous Plans have resulted in significant housing but the infrastructure, especially road and transport infrastructure have not improved at the same rate. Any Plan should improve transport links and infrastructure and this needs to be felt by the communities that are being asked to accommodate new developments. This is particularly acute in areas such as Merley & Bearwood where there is already a strong need for improvements in infrastructure that cannot be further exacerbated by additional development.

It is clear from the above that there is strong opposition to building on the Green Belt. I share those strong concerns. Although it is absolutely the case that a Local Plan is necessary, all avenues should be explored before building on the Green Belt. It does not seem to me that exceptional circumstances exist in this case, which would warrant building on the Green Belt as the option to increase density and height in built up areas is available.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael." with a period at the end. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Tomlinson MP