



**Forest of Dean District
Local Plan 2021 - 2041**

**Issues and Options Summary
September 2019**

Summary of Issues and Options Report, September 2019

1 Introduction

The Forest of Dean District Council has started **creating a new Local Plan** for the Forest of Dean district, which will direct the way the district is developed over a twenty year period from **2021-2041**.

The planning process is in its early stages, and some key **Issues and Options** for the district's future have been broadly scoped out. We now seek the views of the community on these matters. Your feedback will help us to find the best way to respond to them through the new Local Plan.

At this stage, there are **no preferred options**; this is something that will emerge as we work through the Issues and Options with our communities, other organisations and elected representatives.

1.1 A Local Plan is the key document that directs building and development within a certain area. It shows where there are opportunities for development, and indicates what development will and will not be supported by the Council in different areas. The Local Plan provides a broad range of policies and maps on how we use land, including which areas should be used for housing, employment, recreation & wildlife.

1.2 The Local Plan will allocate land for new housing and employment, to provide for the future needs of local communities. It also sets limits to the extent which towns and villages can grow into the surrounding countryside.

1.3 It must provide for a more sustainable future, by helping to reduce carbon emissions through building design and reducing the reliance on private vehicles.

1.4 It will provide policies & strategies on how to protect the places we care about- such as historical buildings, parks, town centres as well as the natural environment. It will also guide the design of new places so that they are pleasant, attractive and inclusive.

1.5 The preliminary stage of drafting a new Local Plan is to identify key issues and options for development within the relevant district. Asking the communities for their thoughts and concerns at an early stage of plan making is critical to ensure local views and values are included in the process.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Essentially, the key issue is how to accommodate the scale of growth and changes that are expected up to 2041, in a way which is sustainable and appropriate. This requires an assessment of the current limits to growth including external drivers and internal constraints, and where some opportunities for growth may lie.

2.2 The Local Plan will contain a wide range of policies which relate to how places function, grow and are preserved. These include the following:

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- Access to jobs and services
- Avoiding flood risk
- Conserving heritage features
- Delivering affordable housing
- Design of new buildings & places
- Digital connectivity
- Employment land & opportunities
- Green Infrastructure
- Provide a housing mix
- Resilience against climate change
- Supporting town centres
- Transport & Infrastructure

2.3 The Local plan must address all these things and more, however the single biggest new use of land will be to accommodate additional housing. Therefore the Local Plan needs to identify suitable opportunities for new housing land which are viable enough to attract developers, and are supported by the necessary standards of infrastructure, while having minimal impact of the environment and existing communities.

2.4 The Plan must **enable the delivery of enough housing** to meet the district's needs up to 2041. The district is expected to deliver in **excess of 350 new dwellings per year**. In period up to 2041, this will result in the need to find **new land for approx. 4,000 new houses**, once existing permissions have been accounted for.

2.5 To calculate housing need into the future, the Council makes a series of assumptions. These include:

- All dwellings that are under construction will be completed, but not all of those that have gained permission will be completed. Combined with existing sites, this will add a further 1,500 to the total housing delivered during the period of 2021-2041.
- Small sites (between 1- 5 houses) will add around 74 new dwellings per year- resulting in an estimated total of 1,480 up to 2041.
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- Windfall sites- or unexpected sites, will continue to deliver housing at the current rate, which would deliver around 1,200 between now and 2041.
- All these things combined would add an estimated total of 4,180 houses built on small sites and windfalls, or come from other sites that are already being constructed or have been permitted.

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- Based on the current housing targets of 330 dwellings per year which has been set for the Forest of Dean district by the UK government (or 6,600 over 20 years), this means that the new Local Plan will need to identify enough suitable land to accommodate for about a further 4,200 houses.
- This means at the current housing density target of 30 dwellings per ha, a further 140 ha of new land for housing will need to be identified in the new Local Plan.

2.6 Furthermore, employment land and services like schools and doctors will need to be provided to all of these new households. These communities will also need transport links and hard infrastructure to support them.

3 Constraints to growth

3.1 Whilst identifying land for new housing and development, we have to operate within a series of constraints, or areas where such development is not appropriate or viable. The main market towns also are limited by a number of factors, which are described below.

Cinderford

3.2 There is presently land for about 600 new housing sites identified in the current plan for Cinderford. Whilst there may be some further capacity for the conversion of brownfield sites (or land that previously was industrial), there is minimal opportunity to expand outwards as 80% of the existing town borders the Statutory Forest of Dean. The remaining 20% looks out towards the River Severn across Littledean, and is characterised by outstanding views and very steep slopes.

Coleford

3.3 Coleford also has housing commitments of around 600 in the current Plan. Coleford and the nearby arc of settlements (Mile End, Broadwell & Coalway) have much of their outer boundary to the Statutory Forest of Dean. There is an area of land between them, but current planning policies support the retention of this land as open space, which is also a stated goal of the Neighbourhood Development Plan which was developed by the Town Council.

Lydney

3.4 There are around 1,600 new houses either permitted or catered for in Lydney in the current Plan, particularly to the east of the town. These houses are expected to continue to come forward well into the 2021-2041 period. Further development of the town is limited by the Severn Estuary on one side and the Statutory Forest which forms part of the existing boundary.

Newent

3.5 Newent is not constrained by the presence of the statutory forest or other sensitive environments, although it is set within an attractive rural setting with a lot of active farming and horticultural industries adjoining it. It has a compact town centre which contains a lot of listed buildings, and will need to be protected.

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Other villages

3.6 Tutshill/ Sedbury is a functional part of Chepstow (which sits in neighbouring Monmouthshire). The Wye and the Severn are both constraints to its expansion. Nearby Beachley Peninsular is constrained by its water front location, but if the army camp is vacated there will be some opportunities for conversion of this site.

3.7 Bream is the next largest village in the district; however it too is constrained by landscape and forest boundary, as is Drybrook and Harrow Hill. Mitcheldean is a major employment hub in the district through Vantage Point. Topography and ecology may constrain Mitcheldean's growth in some directions. Newnham is constrained by its landscape setting alongside the Severn estuary.

3.8 The conurbations of Lydbrook/ Joys Green/ Worrall Hill and Whitecroft/ Pillowell/ Yorkley both total to significant population centres, however they are very constrained by their forest edge locations, as well as topographical and ecological considerations.

Statutory Forest

3.9 The area covered by the Statutory Forest of Dean is 9,358 ha in total, though this includes substantial freeholds. This amounts to 17% of the districts land area. The woodland and associated non-planted areas, many of which form settlement boundaries or lie within them, are owned by the Crown and cannot be developed.

Special areas

3.10 There are a great deal of designated sites in the district- some are statutory and others not. These include Special Areas of Conservation and other ecological considerations, many of which are concentrated on the Wye Valley, Severn estuary and Forest of Dean itself.

3.11 There are also two designated Areas of Natural Beauty (AoNBs) within the district; the Wye Valley AoNB and the southern part of the Malvern Hills AoNB. Whilst these are not absolute constraints to development, they do rule out any development likely to have an adverse effect on their scenic qualities.

Flood risk

3.12 Throughout the FoDD there are areas that are at risk of flooding, including areas of low lying land associated with the Severn estuary and the River Wye. In addition there are floodplains associated with smaller rivers such as the Leadon and the Lyd.

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4 The Options

4.1 There are countless options on how growth might be accommodated within the district on a finer scale, but in broad terms, here are the main options:

OPTIONS	What does this mean?
1. Expansion of a selection of existing settlements;	More land is allocated for growth around key, selected towns and villages which are deemed to be suitable and sustainable locations to accommodate it.
2. Incremental expansion across all settlements;	Each of the existing towns and villages throughout the district are allowed to grow organically until they reach their natural limit. This is closest to the “Do nothing” approach.
3. New, master planned settlement;	A site is identified for an entirely new settlement which may accommodate a large proportion of the new housing needed for the district in the next 20 years.
4. Agreement between neighbouring districts to accommodate FoDD’s housing targets.	One of FODD’s neighbouring districts, such as Tewkesbury or Monmouthshire, agrees to accommodate our targeted housing growth, meaning Forest of Dean district will be permitted to expand at a much slower rate.

4.2 Whilst each of these options present an opportunity, there are also many and varied issues associated with each that will need to be resolved before a decision can be made. It is likely that the final decision will be a combination of more than one approach, which has been tailored to the Forest of Dean district’s unique qualities and circumstances.

4.3 Important considerations for determining the best options include:

1. Promoting a more sustainable form of development which makes a contribution to carbon reduction- especially in respect of selecting longer term locations that reduce the need to travel;
2. Strategic solutions beyond the incremental expansion across all locations are likely to be needed;
3. Environmental and physical constraints will be even more significant than ever, because of the need to mitigate climate change impacts;
4. Existing settlements, especially in the south of the district, are already nearing their capacity limits;
5. Changes which maintain the existing hierarchy and network between settlements are generally more sustainable;

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6. Small sites that are as yet unidentified are expected to continue to come forward at the current rate, meaning they will be part of the incremental change across all options.
7. There may be a need for long term solutions, which accommodate growth even beyond the next Local Plan's 20 year period.

Your comments, ideas and concerns on these dilemmas are highly valued and welcome. Come to one of our drop-in sessions to discuss with a member of the Local Plan team. All comments must be submitted in writing no later than 4.30pm on Thursday 31 October 2019.

**Forest of Dean Council Offices
(Coleford)**

5-8 pm, Wednesday 25 September 2019

Newent Memorial Hall

5-8 pm, Thursday 3 October 2019

The full Issues and Options document can be viewed online at www.fdean.gov.uk or in person at the Council Offices in Coleford.

Comments can be submitted no later than 4.30pm, Thursday 31 October 2019.

- Online at: <http://fdean-consult.objective.co.uk/portal>
- Email: localplans@fdean.gov.uk
- Post: Local Plans, Forest of Dean District Council, Council Offices, High St, Coleford, Glos, GL16 8HG