



SUTTON POYNTZ SOCIETY - PLANNING POLICY

Executive Summary

This document lays out the criteria used by the Sutton Poyntz Society to comment on planning applications relevant to the village.

It is hoped that developers, Weymouth and Portland planning officers, and members of the Weymouth and Portland Planning Committee will find it helpful. It is also self evident that as a consequence of the publication of this document there is no danger at all of comments by the Sutton Poyntz Society being influenced by personal considerations. Planning in the end is a matter of judgement. We have laid out the background to our judgement in this document for all to see.

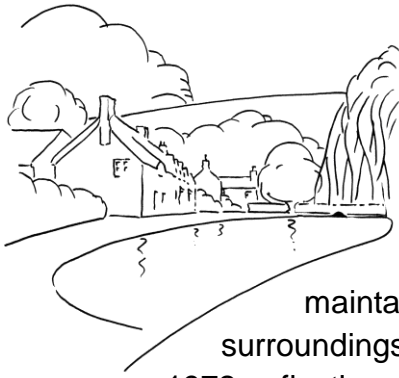
It is important to realise that the Sutton Poyntz Society welcomes beneficial development and that the criteria described here are additional to the regulatory requirements which apply routinely.

This document has been written to provide guidance to those accessing planning applications within the village. It is not intended to be prescriptive about what can or cannot be built, extended or developed. It is intended to provide some guiding principles to ensure that the many various development criteria are adhered to and that the principles behind the declaration of the village as a Conservation Area are upheld.

The Society will assess planning applications against these criteria, and will advise the local planning authority of any conflicts, so that the planning authority can take due account of those matters in their consideration of the application.

Principles for planning specifically in Sutton Poyntz:

1. Preservation of the visual separation from town of Weymouth.
2. Preservation of the compact shape of the village and the open views of surrounding hills from within the village.
3. Preservation of the view of the village from the surrounding hills and AONB.
4. Protection of the character of the Conservation Area through sympathetic design and scale of development.
5. Protection of the visual context through the use of appropriate materials and construction.
6. Protection of the rural nature of the village environment.
7. Provision of appropriate and adequate infrastructure.
8. Encouragement of economic activity that provides employment or facilities.



SUTTON POYNTZ SOCIETY - PLANNING POLICY

The Sutton Poyntz Society was formed in March 1968 “to maintain the natural beauty of the village of Sutton Poyntz and its surroundings”^[1]. Sutton Poyntz was designated a Conservation Area in 1972 reflecting the intention of the local authority and local inhabitants to adopt a policy of requiring development to preserve the visual aspect of the village, and if possible to enhance it. The Conservation Area was extended to the South in 1979 recognising the visual importance of the linear development extending south from the village to St Andrew’s Church.

The village lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Hills to the North of the village are very popular with tourists. The visual impact of proposed development needs to be considered not just from within the village but also as seen from the AONB.

This document provides the rationale for comments made by the Sutton Poyntz Society on development proposals. It is hoped that those preparing development proposals will take our policy into account. Having a public policy also enables the Planning Authority to note that comments provided by the Society are free from prejudice and will allow them to understand the reasoning behind our comments.

The document consists of a series of sections linked to the criteria given in the Executive Summary. We also provide references to the policies of the Local Authority, Government policies, and other definitive documents showing the regulations underpinning our local planning policy.



Village of Sutton Poyntz seen from air

Policy 1: Preservation of the visual separation from the town of Weymouth

Sutton Poyntz is a compact settlement lying in the River Jordan valley in a bowl of hills, the Dorset Ridgeway to the north, Chalbury hill fort to the West and the valley leading to Osmington to the east. The approaches to the village and the views from the village itself show the village to be a distinctly separate settlement from Preston, Weymouth and Osmington. The importance of the separation from Preston has been recognised by the local planning authority for many years and centres around the open land (known locally as the green wedge), whose purpose is “maintain the separate and distinct identities of Sutton Poyntz and Preston” and to “prevent the coalescence of development between these two settlements”^[7]. This green wedge is bordered by Puddledock Lane and its importance has recently been confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate in rejecting a planning appeal.

Development proposals should preserve the compact nature of the village. No development should reduce the gap between Sutton Poyntz and Preston. Development should preserve views of the hills from within the village and the compact nature of the village as viewed from the AONB.



View from hills to north, showing approximate location of Open Gap separating Sutton Poyntz from Preston

Policy 2: Preservation of the compact shape of the village and the open views of surrounding hills from within the village

Views of the hills from within the village convey to the visitor the compact identity of the village. The local authority appraisal for the Sutton Poyntz and Preston Conservation Area calls Sutton Poyntz a “compact settlement” with its “setting provided by the stream and its pond, which is a central feature of the settlement, and by [the] Ridgeway in the background”^[8] (N.B. note the strong similarity here to what characterises Overcombe in Hardy’s *Trumpet Major*). It also notes the “narrow roads, often without footpaths, with open countryside extending as far as the roadside providing exceptional views of the hills, including looking eastwards towards the White Horse”^[8].

For this reason development which blocks such views, or which blurs the sharp transition between village and countryside, are undesirable. Equally, when viewed from the AONB, the compact, bounded nature of the village would be destroyed by developments if allowed to spread beyond the current boundaries.



Important views from the village, identified by Village Survey (1999) ^[3]



**Map showing Conservation Area and other protected areas in and around Sutton Poyntz
(N.B. all but the area south of the A353 is in the AONB)**

Policy 3: Preservation of the view of the village from the surrounding hills and AONB

Sutton Poyntz is wholly within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (see map above). AONB's are "precious landscapes ... whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them"^[5]. Dorset AONB has policies to "protect the AONB from inappropriate development" and to "protect the quality of uninterrupted views into, within and out of the AONB"^[6]. In addition, the local authority's Conservation Area appraisal notes that the "surrounding footpaths ... provide important views into and across the area"^[8].

Recently the importance of views from the AONB was fully recognised in determining a planning appeal. The Inspector gave firm support to the local authority's decision not to allow development on a caravan site which would have degraded the view from the AONB. This principle will be applied in a consistent manner to proposed development in Sutton Poyntz.

Development must not degrade the AONB by creating visually undesirable buildings.

Policy 4: Protection of the character of the Conservation Area through sympathetic design and scale of development

The whole of Sutton Poyntz sits within a designated Conservation Area. As a matter of national policy, new development within a Conservation Area must preserve or enhance the character of the area ^[4].

The local authority's Conservation Area appraisal comments on the "small two storey ... cottages predominating" in Sutton Poyntz, "characterised by the use of local rubble stone with slate, thatch and clay tile roofs". It also notes, as an example of good architectural practice, the "vernacular cottage style by Mr Walmsley-Lewis" whose houses "provide a strong architectural link with the centre of Sutton Poyntz".

It is true that Sutton Poyntz has suffered from unsympathetic development in the past. But this is no reason not to require developers to meet the requirement to preserve or enhance the Conservation Area. This can be achieved at minimal cost to the developer, and arguably helps developers to maximise the value of the completed development; it is simply a matter of responding to the nature of the Conservation Area rather than simply choosing the cheapest option. Developers of sites with multiple dwelling should take account of the visual impact of both building design and site layout. Designs should not clash with the existing surrounding buildings nor detract from the visual aspect from the road.



An example of sympathetic recent development, with appropriate materials and part-preservation of a view

Some features of the village should be maintained. The centre of the village is characterised by buildings that are predominantly compact in scale and rural in appearance, mainly using stone rubble and a mix of thatched and slate roofs.

From this central area there are several village lanes, all without footpaths and therefore retaining their rural nature. Development has put these lanes at risk. Hedges and boundary walls are so important to the nature of the village environment. The requirements for vehicle access unless carefully designed damages the rural nature of these lanes.

Sutton Road has a mixture of development, including some very attractive early terraced cottages. Again recent developments have had mixed success in terms of enhancing the Conservation area. Problems have arisen where too many individual houses have been squeezed onto too small a site leading to an appearance of over development and dominance of the street. On the other hand where good design has been employed, large individual houses have been built with a visual result which can genuinely claim to enhance the Conservation Area. Skilled architectural design combined with thoughtful site layout leaves open views through the development to the countryside beyond.

Plaisters Lane is a complete contrast, with detached houses of varying style but all on individual plots. Most are of moderate size and only recently have planning decisions allowed over dominant development. This is regrettable. Future development should take careful account of siting on the plot and such details as roof design to avoid the problems of visually overly large structures.

Policy 5: Protection of the visual context through the use of appropriate materials and construction

Older buildings in the heart of the village are typically small two storey cottages built with local, or Portland, rubble stone. A few are still thatched although many have replaced (and raised) roofs of tile or slate. There is some stucco especially towards the top of Sutton Road, again on top of local rubble. In recent years (from around 1960) efforts were made to encourage building in stone although it has mostly been in guillotined Purbeck stone rather than Portland rubble. Even the casual observer can see the difference, in some locations such as around the pond, Portland stone is much to be preferred.

Away from the centre of the village there is more scope for varied materials, but even so there are some obvious material choices which blend more readily with this Dorset village. There is some impressive corrugated iron roofing behind the Springhead pub but not even the most cost conscious developer would propose a new cottage with a corrugated iron roof on the grounds that it “fits with existing vernacular”. Perhaps less obviously, clapboard construction does not sit easily with Dorset cottages and simply because it may exist in one or two places does not mean it is typical and therefore to be copied. Examples of the use of traditional materials in some recent developments in Sutton Road show clearly how the use of thatch can make a development more visually appealing.



The historic heart of the village, showing rubble stone with thatch and slate roofs

Traditional materials should be used to preserve the nature of the Conservation Area certainly in the heart of the village. This means stone, and where possible rubble stone for outer wall construction. Thatch is highly desirable although for single dwelling developments the cost may be significant. Where developments consist of more than one dwelling thatch should be used mixed with other roofing materials.

The new Local Plan^[9] makes a valuable statement about the creation of “placeless” buildings through the use of materials that are not locally sourced. This danger is particularly acute in a Conservation Area such as Sutton Poyntz.

Policy 6: Protection of the rural nature of the village environment

The entrances to the village, either road or footpath, have in the past had attractive hedges or walls. Mission Hall Lane used to be a highlight of the Conservation Area because of its hedges and walls. Unfortunately many of these have been lost in recent years either through development or removal of hedges. The result is a steady change from a rural to a suburban aspect and very much not the intent of the Conservation Area. Often it is vehicle access that triggers these changes, even changing surface materials can be visually detrimental if unsuitable materials or designs are used. The local authority’s Conservation Area appraisal specifically notes the damage that has been caused to the rural look of lanes by “requirements of vehicular access and the need for sightlines”^[8].

Boundary walls are mainly of stone construction, frequently with “cock and hen” tops. Some very attractive garden walls have been built in recent years in Sutton Road and in the path leading to the Weir, completely in keeping with traditional materials and methods.

Trees are protected within the Conservation Area, permission is required before pruning or felling can take place. However, not all trees are suitable for their location and some will require felling. In general, trees should not be felled without good reason, and indigenous species should only exceptionally be felled. Where tree felling is genuinely unavoidable, our policy is for replacement, using a species suitable for the context, so that the overall stock is not reduced.

Older hedges should be preserved especially those that create green entrances to the village. Boundary walls of stone, especially the older walls, should be retained. New walls should be of traditional stone construction.



The trees around the pond are important, but are outgrowing their location and need maintenance

Policy 7: Provision of appropriate and adequate infrastructure

Sutton Poyntz suffers from surface water problems which have been exacerbated by development over the past 40 years. Where the landscape has been hardened the surface water run off has increased to the point where in times of heavy (but not exceptional) rain the river no longer copes and the foul sewer overflows.

Because much of the development has been single dwellings, or two or three at the most, the surface water and foul sewer problems do not seem to be acknowledged by the local authority. Whether thirty houses are built at once or over a period of years the effect on the flooding problem is the same. This is now a serious issue and should therefore be thoroughly reviewed even for single dwelling planning applications.

The Society will oppose any proposal which would present a danger of pollution of any kind. This includes noise which would be detrimental to the rural peacefulness of the village or would threaten the villagers' expectation of reasonable tranquillity.

Each new development demands vehicle access. As a consequence the road scene changes, sometimes not noticeably, but at others very significantly. Some sensitive sites are even damaged. The narrow rural lanes deserve more care in access design than routine, the damage possible is all too permanent and significant.

Proposed developments, even single dwellings, must show that the hardening of the landscape will not add to the surface water and sewer overflow problems. Road access must preserve the character of the Conservation Area. Proposals which are likely to increase noise of any kind at a noticeable level will be opposed by the Society.



Flooding of River Jordan (from Village Survey 1999) ^[3]

Policy 8: Sustain existing economic activity in the village and encourage new businesses where they create local employment or offer facilities supporting the community

Economic well-being encompasses a number of factors, beyond the usual measures of household disposable income and employment. These include: access to services (such as doctors, education and local shops); communications (such as super-fast broadband); the condition of the neighbourhood; and community facilities.

Sutton Poyntz has traditionally featured a mixed economy and a diverse demography. Originally an agricultural community, the Jordan river supported milling as early as the fourteenth century while the waterworks has supplied Weymouth for over 150 years. Livestock and arable farming are still important but, increasingly, more varied activities have been introduced such as summer camping and honey farming. The number of businesses in the village has fallen over recent years, including the loss of Hunt's Timber Yard, but others, including the Sutton Poyntz Carriage Co and the Springhead public house continue to operate. The latter provides both employment and a focus for village social life. There are no convenience stores or shops in the village, but there are a number of self-employed businesses that offer a variety of services ranging from bed and breakfast to child-minding and dog-walking.

A successful and vibrant community requires a range of services, as well as a range of employment opportunities. Sutton Poyntz will not thrive if it excludes the young or those of working age. It is important, therefore, in planning future development that the wider needs of the village and villagers are addressed, particularly where they impact on economic well-being. An example of unwelcome development would be any change in the use of the Springhead public house or the Mission Hall. On the other hand, the opening of a convenience store in the village could benefit a community that currently has either to drive and walk over a mile to purchase basic essentials. As ever, a balance will need to be struck between protecting all that is good about Sutton Poyntz and meeting the existing and future economic needs of its inhabitants.



Motor works at the Cart Shed

References.

1. Sutton Poyntz Society Constitution
2. Sutton Poyntz Society Conservation Policy
3. Sutton Poyntz Society Village Survey 1999
4. Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990
5. National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
6. Dorset AONB Management Plan
7. Weymouth Local Plan 2008, Appendix 2 – Important Open Gaps¹
8. Weymouth Local Plan 2008, Appendix 3 – Conservation Area Appraisals²
9. Draft Local Plan for West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, July 2012

¹ The Important Open Gaps specified in the 1998/2008 Local Plans for Weymouth & Portland are carried forward into the new Local Plan for West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland until such time as a new Green Infrastructure strategy is developed.

² The new Local Plan also retains the Conservation Areas and Conservation Area Appraisals previously adopted in the 1998 and 2008 Local Plans.