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Planning, Transportation and Environment

Mid Devon District Council
Phoenix House
Phoenix Lane
Tiverton
Devon
EX16 6PP

Lucombe House
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

Sent by email to
planningconsultations@middevon.gov.uk

Email:

Tel:

15 August 2013



Dear Sirs

Mid Devon Local Plan Review Scoping Report Consultation

I am writing to advise you of Devon County Council's response to the Mid Devon Local Plan Review Scoping Report consultation that was published in July 2013¹.

A number of detailed comments are included in the appendix to this letter. These relate specifically to the questions within the document. On more strategic matters however, we have the following comments.

It appears that an important question for the Local Plan Review is to establish whether or not the pattern of urban concentration that is currently set out in the existing Local Plan documents is to be pursued. Mid Devon is largely rural in nature, and because of this, development should be focussed at the main towns within the district. This is because these provide the greatest number of community services and greatest opportunities for providing employment (or attracting new employment). This urban concentration development strategy ensures that distances between homes, services and jobs are shorter, which reduces reliance on the private car and ensures that those without a car can access services and employment. Another benefit of this is that a concentration of development into larger sites creates economies of scale facilitating infrastructure investment. It is therefore considered that the new Local Plan should continue with the urban concentration strategy of the last Local Plan.

In addition, a key driver behind the Local Plan Review appears to be the need to improve the delivery of employment land development, and promote economic growth more generally within the district. In considering the future economic

¹ - Available at <http://www.middevon.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=20074&p=0>

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development of the area, the plan will need to recognise the interaction between the district and the major employment growth anticipated in the Exeter area, and ensure that the scale and nature of provision within Mid Devon is based on the fundamental underlying economic characteristics and advantages of the area – i.e. setting the right balance between aspiration and realism as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Clearly, the future economic strategy needs to be considered in the light of the economic downturn, predicted growth and also, further information which has emerged, such as Devon County Council's 'sectors' research². This sets out which business sectors have the greatest potential to do well in Mid Devon and the Local Plan should provide for the development sites that will best suit the requirements of these sectors.

A key principle behind planning is that it enables communities to identify ways in which their places of home, work and leisure can be enhanced. The scoping report mentions that some of the town centres within the district are in decline, but does not specifically suggest any strategies to address this. Whilst it is recognised that the existing Core Strategy includes regeneration as a theme throughout its policies, it would appear that the review of the Local Plan would be an opportune time to assess whether such policies are effective and how they may be improved.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the timescale of the proposed Local Plan. It appears that the review will result in a new Local Plan that runs to 2031. In recognition of evidence from other district councils that plan preparation often takes longer than anticipated, it may be the case that the plan will not run for 15 years when it comes to examination (which is required under the NPPF). It is therefore considered that a plan running to 2033 may be more appropriate. This corresponds with the emerging Teignbridge Local Plan.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss any of the comments in this letter or in the appendix below.

Yours faithfully,

Stuart Langer
Senior Planning Officer
Devon County Council

2 - This and other supporting economic documents are available at
<http://www.devonics.info/documents>

Textphone: 0845 155 1020
www.devon.gov.uk

Strategic Director Place Heather Barnes

Appendix I: Mid Devon Local Plan Scoping Consultation - Detailed Comments

Page / paragraph reference	Comment
Para 1.8	The demographic figures which suggest that Mid Devon growth rates are significantly higher than elsewhere should be explained and contextualised further in the subsequent Local Plan and associated evidence base. For example, clarity should be provided about how the specific population groups within Mid Devon have changed over time. If required, the county council is able to provide this type of information. This evidence should also be used to inform any future Strategic Housing Market Assessment which is undertaken in future.
Page 6 onwards	<p>It is considered that the Mid Devon District Profile section of the Local Plan should include an assessment of the condition of existing infrastructure within the district. In particular, this could highlight where deficiencies are and where priority for infrastructure spending will be. The impact of the emerging CIL regime could also be explained and discussed. Devon County Council would be happy to provide information relating to its statutory functions for such a section if desired.</p> <p>In addition to consideration of infrastructure provision, other environmental features of the district could be examined and explained, including landscape, flooding, mineral reserves and accessible green space. It could also refer to renewable energy generation in the district.</p>
Para 1.19	The North Devon Biosphere reserve transition area covers part of Mid Devon. This area is being managed to ensure that more sustainable development occurs, including enhancements so that biodiversity can be maximised. In particular, the biosphere is involved in a biodiversity offsetting pilot project and therefore the opportunities this offers should be reflected in the text in this section.
Pages 11 and 31	The importance and status of Mid Devon's heritage assets should be promoted within the Local Plan review. The county council holds information about locally and nationally important assets that we are willing to share and use as a basis for discussion.
Page 14 'A vision for Mid Devon'	It is considered that the section of the vision relating to sustainable transport modes being encouraged could be strengthened. Opportunities for travel by active and more sustainable modes should be proactively delivered, through the work of both authorities and through the form of development that is provided within the district.
Para 2.1	It is important to recognise that Mid Devon is an area with two tiers of local government, and the roles of the two tiers should be set out in this section. Furthermore, the roles of the Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Nature Partnership and Local Enterprise Partnership in providing strategic direction should be mentioned in this section, and potentially in others.
Para 2.5	This paragraph begins by stating that there is a growing population, as shown earlier in the document. In assessing the appropriate scale of development to be provided for in the Local Plan, it has been recognised in the scoping report that the future development of the district needs to be considered in the wider sub regional context and Strategic Housing Market Area. Future growth will be driven more by migration pressures and the scale of housing supply brought forward rather than population growth arising from

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	<p>within the District. This will be a key focus for cooperation with neighbouring authorities and the County Council.</p> <p>It would also be helpful to consider anticipated changes in the age structure of the population – including change in the working age population, and growth in the younger and older age groups.</p>
<p>Pages 18 and 19 Development allocation</p>	<p>Of the three options listed, option 1 is felt to accord most strongly with the Core Planning Principles set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Specifically, the importance of focussing housing development in locations accessible to the main centres with economic growth potential. This both reduces overall travel needs and maximises the scope for the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling. The larger settlements in the district offer the greatest potential to achieve this, due to their greater size and the economies of scale that this offers in terms of offering employment and services in the same settlements.</p> <p>Option 2 will result in less sustainable development as it is more likely to create a reliance upon the increased travel by, and the use of, the private car as a mode of travel, and therefore will reduce the scope for people to travel actively and more sustainably. However it is recognised that limited development in smaller settlements would potentially have some benefits in terms of supporting local community services.</p> <p>Whilst option 3 may seem an attractive prospect in that it would allow development to be diverted from the other towns in the district, the impact of developing a new settlement within the district needs to be carefully considered. For example it is likely that the scale of such a new community would require a major level of investment in new infrastructure, facilities and core services and this would necessarily impact on future investment in existing settlements. This is likely to have a negative effect as the benefits of growth in terms of regeneration and infrastructure investment would not be realised within these towns.</p> <p>There is also a major concern that the realisation of the economic growth potential provided for in the current plan at Tiverton and Cullompton could be prejudiced by the need to promote a new employment hub that would be needed as the basis of a sustainable new community. The new communities at Sherford and Cranbrook were both closely related to the strategic economic scale and growth potential of Plymouth and Exeter respectively – building on that economic base rather than establishing a new employment focus.</p> <p>It is also important to consider the actual experience in terms of delivery of the Cranbrook and Sherford new communities. Both of these new communities have had significant lead in times, taking over 15 years from first being considered in plans to planning permission being granted, let alone constructed. Within a plan period looking ahead to even 2031, the main focus for development will continue to be in the three main towns.</p> <p>If despite these major considerations, the concept of a new community within</p>

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	<p>Mid Devon is retained at this stage, its location would need to be carefully considered. Sherford and Cranbrook are located in close proximity to Plymouth and Exeter respectively. This is deliberate and is important in ensuring that the need to travel is minimised and public transport (and in some cases cycling) is an attractive modal choice between the new settlement and its 'companion' large urban area.</p> <p>Furthermore, a new community proposal within Mid Devon would need to form part of a wider development strategy for the sub region and, if progressed, address the wider development needs of that area having regard to the ongoing development planned at Cranbrook and elsewhere.</p>
Para 2.23	<p>It is also worth noting in this paragraph that higher density development may not address the needs of the local area, as it may not be possible to provide the correct mix and tenure of dwellings within high density developments, in some locations. Having said this, higher density developments in urban centres are useful in ensuring that land is used in an efficient manner. Whilst minimum density standards may not be helpful in some locations, consideration should be given to applying such standards in the urban centres.</p>
Page 22 - Housing options	<p>On balance, option 2 is preferred. The housing requirements in the Local Plan should be based on up to date and relevant evidence, this is set out in the NPPF, para 158. It is considered that the previous Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment are out of date (indeed this is reflected by the fact that Mid Devon District Council are revising these assessments). Option 1 would not necessarily reflect the updated assessments and in this case, would not comply with the NPPF. It will be important to consider detailed development viability evidence regarding when considering the proportion of affordable housing which should be included within emerging Local Plan. This should specifically consider the viability of affordable housing and infrastructure provision in a comprehensive manner.</p>
Page 25 - Employment options	<p>Option 2 is preferred. While the objective of securing greater self sufficiency is understood, the plan has to recognise the real economic drivers affecting future development. The Exeter area will continue to act as an important employment base for a significant proportion of Mid Devon residents; indeed the realisation of the Exeter area's strategic potential relies on attracting employees from the wider travel to work area. The plan needs to provide for growth in the local economy but, in reality, the scale of provision within the adopted Plan is likely to meet those needs beyond 2026.</p> <p>In addition to the above, it is also important to ensure that the employment land that is available in Mid Devon is suited to the type of businesses and employers who desire to locate in Mid Devon. The economy of Devon, including Mid Devon, is strongly characterised by a concentration of small and medium sized enterprises and micro businesses. Mid Devon is also characterised by a relatively healthy manufacturing sector. Mid Devon's employment land allocation should reflect the mix of business types in the area that are likely to drive demand in the future, focusing on well-connected areas closest to population centres where demand will be highest and travel to work options are most sustainable. There is also scope within the District</p>

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	<p>to encourage the use of redundant agricultural buildings in a manner that is sensitive to their surroundings, to help meet employment use demands in their immediate area, in line with the recent changes to the the general permitted development order.</p> <p>As discussed above, it is important to refer to up-to-date evidence bases and the recent employment land review forms part of the appropriate evidence base in this case. Furthermore, the Devonomics web resource provides a considerable evidence base which can be used to plan for the type and size of employment development within Mid Devon. This is available at http://www.devonomics.info/</p>
Page 30 - Infrastructure options	<p>The options as presented appear to raise fundamental issues about the delivery of sustainable development, and the whole development strategy for the area based on relative infrastructure provision consequences and costs. While it is appropriate to consider how best to take advantage of existing infrastructure it would be difficult to reconcile the delivery of a sustainable development pattern with the dispersed form of development set out in Option 2. Furthermore, it is considered that larger development sites offer the opportunity to provide targeted interventions and investment in local infrastructure. Economies of scale are often required to achieve this which is a benefit of larger development sites.</p> <p>In reality, the infrastructure investment necessary to deliver the current plan will provide much of the capacity necessary to support further growth in the three main towns. It is questioned therefore whether the options presented are real choices in the way presented.</p> <p>It also appears that the options on page 30 of the Local Plan Review scoping report are included to help determine the approach for how developer contributions under section 106 of the Planning Act (1990, as amended) will be collected taking into account the new community infrastructure (CIL) regime. CIL guidance states that councils should set out clearly how the two developer contribution funding mechanisms should work together and therefore, Mid Devon District Council should set out in more detail what sort of items s106 is likely to fund and what items CIL is likely to fund.</p> <p>The county council considers that s106 should be utilised for site specific infrastructure items such as schools, internal roads and also for access. CIL should be used for specific items that require contributions from the wider development across the district - such as major highway schemes that provide mitigation for wider development impact. It should be noted that in April 2013, the government consulted upon the potential for developers to build infrastructure, the cost of which would then be subtracted from their CIL liability. If this proposal becomes possible then Mid Devon District Council should provide guidance on when such arrangements would be appropriate.</p>
Page 31 -Environment	<p>Devon County Council has no preference for the policy structure of how local distinctiveness is addressed through development. It is important that however the policy is prepared, that it reflects the most up to date requirements of national planning policy and other environmental legislation, and is based on local assessments including but by no means limited to the</p>

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	Mid Devon green infrastructure assessment and Devon Biodiversity Action Plan and utilises the heritage asset information that Devon County Council holds.
Page 33 - Tiverton	Option 1 is preferred. Tiverton urban extension is being planned as a strategic area of development that will contribute significant infrastructure to the town, including a new junction onto the A361, new primary school infrastructure and potentially a new energy recovery waste plant. Further development to the East of Tiverton could make use of this infrastructure which is already being planned for comprehensively. Regarding the fact that the currently allocated Tiverton East area will not be able to provide the quantity of development previously envisaged it is appropriate to consider if the area of the eastern allocation needs to be increased within the Local Plan.
Page 36 - Cullompton	<p>The key issues in Cullompton from a spatial planning point of view appear to be that the town centre is declining (see page 27 of the review consultation document) and is also affected by poor air quality, largely due to levels of traffic that use it.</p> <p>New development within Cullompton will further impact upon air quality in the town and for this reason, the Eastern Relief Road was put forward and safeguarded in the plan as a key element of infrastructure to help solve the air quality issues. Development will need to fund, at least in part, the relief road because the additional traffic will worsen the air quality issues within the town centre.</p> <p>The county council consider that if there was no significant development in Cullompton (that is, considerably less than that contained within the existing core strategy), then it would be challenging to deliver the eastern relief road.</p> <p>The NPPF requires local authorities to recognise the importance of, and promote town centres to ensure that they become economically competitive, this is particularly the case where they are in decline, which appears to be the case in Cullompton (page 27 of the scoping report suggests this). It is considered that the Local Plan Review should also focus on the whether the economic regeneration policies in the existing Local Plan are functioning, and whether or not these need to be strengthened or amended in any way.</p>
Page 38 - Crediton	Clearly the allocation of development in Crediton needs to be based on an up-to-date and relevant evidence base. However, the county council is unsure of how option two can come forward if Crediton is too constrained to accommodate further development. The results of the updated SHMA and SHLAA will help to determine the final development allocation, although clearly the physical constraints of any settlement cannot be ignored.
Page 39 - Bampton	The County Council's key message about Bampton is that there are no new major strategic infrastructure issues in terms of the provision of schools, libraries and other County Council services. The level of development which could come forward through either of the development strategy options would not have significant implications for infrastructure provision.
Page 42 - Villages	The County Council would favour option 1. Option 1 is felt to accord most strongly with the Core Planning Principles set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Specifically, the importance of focussing development in

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	<p>locations to make the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling. The larger settlements offer the greatest potential to achieve this, due to their greater size and the economies of scale that this offers in terms of offering employment and services in the same settlements.</p> <p>Option 2 will result in less sustainable development as it is more likely to create a reliance upon the private car as a mode of travel, and therefore will reduce the scope for people to travel actively and more sustainably.</p> <p>It may be appropriate for the Local Plan Review to determine whether some of the villages that may have sustainable travel opportunities could be considered for higher levels of development.</p> <p>The approach taken to accommodating growth in the villages should be seen in the context of Neighbourhood Plans and the roles these may have in determining the scale of small scale, local development.</p>
Page 44 - Managing Development	<p>Option 2 is preferred in order to make sure the new Local Plan is up-to-date. One particular comment we have is about the existing development management policy 5.7, which refers to a register of non-designated assets. This potentially leads to confusion and duplication between what is recorded on the historic environment record that Devon County Council maintains, and the 'local list' of significant but non-designated heritage assets. The county council is happy to discuss this as the review of policies progresses.</p>