



Campaign to Protect Rural England



Mid Devon Group

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To: Ms. Liz Pickering,
Forward Planning Officer,
Mid Devon District Council,
Phoenix House,
Phoenix Lane,
Tiverton EX16 6PP

28th March 2011

Dear Ms. Pickering,

Re: A Vision for Green Infrastructure - Mid Devon Consultation Document.

Thank you for kindly including the Mid Devon CPRE Group as consultees for the above document.

The Mid Devon CPRE Group Committee discussed the document, "A Vision for Green Infrastructure", at the Group's latest Committee meeting and they asked me, as the Group's secretary, to respond to the document as follows:-

- 1) General: The Group supports MDDC's vision for the Green Infrastructure (GI) and welcomes the strategy to promote a network of multi-functional green space with recreational, visual and biodiversity value which will offer great benefits to both urban and rural communities as well as for biodiversity.

The Mid Devon CPRE Group also very much welcomes the strategy for Blue Infrastructure especially as the Mid Devon area has so many springs and water courses which lead into major rivers such as the Taw, the Exe with its special steep valleys, the Little Dart and many others. Tiverton Canal and its environs with its walking and cycling leisure opportunities is of great importance giving pleasure to locals and tourists as well as providing biodiversity and economic benefits for the local economy. CPRE also considers that ponds and lakes whether public or private offer another element for Blue Infrastructure and the Group would welcome the possible inclusion of these in large developments including commercial. An example of this has been noticed as a pleasant water feature pond by a large development for offices not far from the M3, junction 5 near Hook.

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2) Benefits of Green Infrastructure:-

2a - Biodiversity and Nature Conservation -

2a(i) The Mid Devon CPRE Group while supporting Mid Devon's Green Infrastructure vision and strategy are concerned about the possible manicuring of the countryside which could lead to a loss of habitats and flora. It is important for rough woodland, copses, scrub areas and grass roadside verges to exist for their biodiversity and habitat value. The Devon hedge banks are an important feature in Mid Devon with their wild flowers, much appreciated by visitors and local communities. Although hedgerows are mainly protected by legislation, some are being lost by neglect while all too often large developments remove many such features instead of trying to integrate them where possible in the development's layout. CPRE would like to see the retention of the above,

CPRE believes that gardens are part of green infrastructure from the biodiversity and nature conservation aspect as they provide a network of havens for birds as well as other wildlife. Garden ponds and water courses provide valuable habitats such as for frogs and grass snakes while providing drop-in sites for herons, ducks and rare egret..

(ii) Trees and Woodland - There has, since the 1960's, been a loss of notable trees in certain Mid Devon countryside areas due to the elm disease. CPRE would like to see protection for hedgerow trees and the encouragement for their growth as they provide habitats for many creatures as well as being important landscape features sometimes of special significance, such as the dancing tree near the pub at Cheriton Bishop. People's enjoyment of the countryside is often linked to trees. As an example of this when Morchard Bishop Parish carried out its Agenda 21 survey in the late 1990's, the lack of trees was remarked on and requests came forward for more planting of trees in the parish.

Woodlands - Woodlands such as the Forestry Commission Flashdown and Eggesford Forests as well as private woods need to be protected for their biodiversity benefits and the benefits they provide to help the adverse impact of climate change.

b) Climate change mitigation and adaption:-

Having referred to climate change in the above paragraph regarding the value of trees and woodland, CPRE would like to advocate as part of the Green Infrastructure vision, the planting of trees and other vegetation in large developments of all kinds to mitigate the adverse affects of hard standing areas such as large car parks e.g. for retail and industrial development sites. Such planting would help to absorb water run-off and also to help with the adverse effect of CO2 emissions.

Mention is made of renewable energy (e.g. wind or solar power) and while CPRE supports renewable energy in principle, the Group considers that each proposal should be judged on its own merits, according to its location, its size and scale and any detrimental affect on the local landscape, on the quality of local people's lives and on biodiversity.

c) Landscape Setting and the Historic Environment:-

The quality and character of Mid Devon's countryside is of great importance as part of the Green Infrastructure both visually and for its biodiversity and wildlife. It is the pattern of fields, hedgerows and intermittent woodlands which are visual amenity assets appreciated by local people and tourists, many of whom come to enjoy these qualities and thereby help with the local economy. The landscapes act as settings for the historic villages and towns of Mid Devon. The surrounding countryside can be seen from the villages and from parts of the towns - as an example the green setting to the south of Tiverton. Such views are important as visual amenities for the well-being of communities. Distant views are important too e.g. Posbury Clump, a clump of hilltop trees, the site of a 7th Century battle and an ancient quarry, lying to the south of Crediton - views of hilltop churches and their settlements e.g. Colebrooke, Coldridge and others.

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2c) Landscape Setting and the Historic Environment (continued):-

Gardens too are important for their visual green quality being a part of the historic environment belonging to the rural cottages and older town buildings. Gardens provide green spatial qualities within a built area and for bio-diversity and CPRE would like to see provision for larger gardens within new development. Unsympathetic in-fill within villages can adversely affect the historic quality of settlements and people's enjoyment of them.

- Open Moorland: The Mid Devon CPRE Group believe that such moorlands should be unfenced as fencing immediately alters their character of openness and has a detrimental affect of the public's enjoyment of an open moor. Fencing is also harmful to wildlife and bio-diversity as the freedom of movement of deer, badgers and foxes etc. would be constrained.

d) Local Food Production - Agriculture.

CPRE supports reducing food miles and has for a long time advocated it as a nation wide objective. It has also recognised and supported the importance of productive agricultural land as a sustainable and finite resource. The Group believes that such land should be protected and not used for other purposes such as large development particularly industrial. It is accepted that that the Tiverton Eastern Urban expansion will go forward but that green areas and green bio-diversity corridors will be incorporated into the plan for the well-being of the community and bio-diversity benefits. For these reasons CPRE further supports MDDC's GI strategy which "...can establish ways of protecting and promoting local farming. . ." etc.

CPRE believes that funding as mentioned under the above heading in the above document should be carefully assessed according to its effects on the landscape, on farming practices and on local communities. Adverse effects would be extra traffic implications and loss of visual amenity value affecting the wellbeing of local communities. CPRE would welcome field margins to be left around fields for wild-life and bio-diversity benefits.

e) Public Health and Wellbeing:-

e(i) The Mid Devon CPRE Group recognises and fully supports the provision of play areas, sports fields, allotments and recreational green space, cycle routes and "public footpaths" as being an essential part of the GI Strategy Vision for the social wellbeing of communities in Mid Devon both rural and urban. Their provision is very relevant to new developments. It is hoped that GI assessments will be a required part of applications for new developments and to include waterways coming under Blue Infrastructure. Allotments are important both from the social aspect as well as the production of home grown food.

e(ii) "Public footpaths" - Under the above section reference is made to "public footpaths". CPRE would be grateful if this could be changed to "public rights of way". The whole public rights of way is part of the GI network and valued by local communities and visitors whether they be walkers, riders, cyclists or horse-drawn carriage drivers. The term would also accord with MDDC's Core Strategy, COR1(i), p.26 which refers to "the provision of accessible green infrastructure networks . . ." This includes "public rights of way" as described on p.27, para. 7.1 of the Core Strategy, COR(i). CPRE also asks if the same change can be made in the Green Infrastructure Vision document under "What is Green Infrastructure? - for the word "footpath" to be replaced with "public rights of way"? They are much valued green routes providing links into the Mid Devon countryside for communities and tourists as well as routes to other villages and views of the area whether on foot or horseback or cycling. They can provide safe walking routes for children and their parents to schools away from traffic.

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2 (e) Public Health and Wellbeing (continued):-

e(iii) As part of the GI green network and Mid Devon's heritage, there are also unsurfaced Unclassified Roads (uUCRs) which provide links with some public rights of way and offer safe walking, riding and off-road cycling for local communities. They also give a sense of history with their Devon banks and give great enjoyment as peaceful areas with a rich diversity of flora and vegetation which children can enjoy with their parents. These routes are included in Devon County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan, chapter 1, p.8, para. 1.3 and chapter 4, p.48, para. 4.2E where it is stated that ". . . uUCRs also form an important recreational resource for vulnerable road users (walkers, cyclists and horse-riders/drivers). . ." CPRE believes that for the reasons given above these routes should be part of the GI Vision. A good example of a uUCR is south of Black Dog near Morchard Bishop where a uUCR goes from Staple Green to South Emlett. Footpaths link into it as well as a long Restricted Byway leading into Sandford Parish.

f(i) Areas of Tranquillity and f(ii) Night Skies and Light Pollution.

f(i) Further to the heading "Public Health and Wellbeing", CPRE also considers that the above factors are very important for rural communities and others when being in the countryside away from the noise of ongoing traffic or frequent plane traffic. CPRE produced maps called "Areas of Tranquillity" which showed certain areas of Mid Devon e.g. Puddington, Poughill areas as being the quietest in England. The quietness and peace of certain parts of Mid Devon are fully appreciated and give a sense of contentment for those visiting such areas and for those living here. As part of the wellbeing of communities, CPRE would be grateful if reference to "Areas of Tranquillity" could be included in the GI Vision.

f(ii) Night Skies and Light Pollution - Likewise to the above, because of the unpolluted vision of night skies and being able to see the stars in rural areas in Mid Devon which gives a great sense of wellbeing, CPRE would be grateful if a reference could be made in the GI Vision for Mid Devon as one of its assets for the here and now and their protection for future generations.

On behalf of the Mid Devon CPRE Group, as the Group's secretary, I hope that the above comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A large, dark, irregularly shaped redaction mark covering the signature area.

Copies to: Mid Devon CPRE Group Committee members.