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**Tel:**

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The Senior Planning Officer  
Mid Devon District Council  
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12<sup>th</sup> March 2014



Dear Sir or Madam

### **LOCAL PLAN REVIEW AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION**

Following the recent meeting called by Willand Parish Council on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March I am writing to express my views on the above.

I fully understand the pressures from the Government to increase the nation's housing stock and I am sure that we are both agreed that the sites selected in Mid Devon should be equally advantageous for newcomers and existing residents alike.

However, I believe that Devon County Council has shown wisdom in placing two new towns in open countryside rather than enlarging existing villages/townships. I refer, of course to Cranbrook and Sherford. Obviously, the advantage of planning on more or less a clean sheet is that it enables the necessary infrastructure to be set in the right place at the right time, as the development proceeds.

I started working in this part of Mid Devon in 1974 and have lived at this address well in excess of 20 years. In that time the conservation area of Willand has been dwarfed many times over by the construction of eight housing estates of varying sizes. By common consent, developers' interests have come first and infrastructure second.

The pressure group: "Residents Against Planning Errors" was founded by Eddie Dennis, the former Leader of Mid Devon Council, and other villagers, in the 1980s, because of this very issue. A golden opportunity to add to the centre of the village was missed a year ago when the Gables site was sold for yet more housing.

Looking at the Policies Map – Options Willand / Junction 27, I am appalled at the prospect of a ribbon development stretching 2.5 miles bordering the M5 motorway up to and including Junction 27. The suggested housing alone will place enormous strains on water supply, sewerage, education and health, not to mention the effects of further industrial development. The adult population would exceed the existing population of Willand many times over.

Let me take education as just one example. I retired as Head of English at Uffculme School, now a converting Academy. Since 1974 to the present time, the pupil population has increased by an average of 7% p.a. to the present 955 on roll. Projecting that forward to 2026, it is likely that the N.O.R. will have far exceeded 2,000 pupils. An extra 3,000 houses, as suggested in the Policies Map, would, on the basis of .9 children per household, result in a further 2,700 children! Local primary schools are at or near capacity. Willand Primary School has been extended and I assume that any further building on that site would exceed the Government's guidelines on recreational space.

One particular suggestion is, I contend, more ridiculous than the others: Dean Hill Road. This is a lane with z-bends and narrow sections barely wide enough for one vehicle. It is hedged in by motorway and railway line. I understand that it has no public sewerage system. It is already used as a rat-run by employees going to-and-fro the Two Sisters plant. On several occasions I have, personally, seen a narrow miss as drivers exit the lane onto the B3181 where visibility is restricted at the top of the hill near the railway bridge. Any worse place for a housing development, constricted as it is, I cannot imagine!

I now come to the development at Junction 27. Willand residents were left in some confusion at the village meeting concerning the intentions of the likely developer. They appear vague. Most motorway junctions have been developed successively as at Junction 30. Obviously, when the plans are submitted, more rigorous inspection will be possible. My concern is that the development will consist of a series of sheds for logistics companies. A tasteful development that is not in conflict with existing businesses could be welcomed. For example, The Old Well garden centre and restaurant has been built up over many years by the Lamyman family to become one of the best in the area – the sort of infrastructure created by local entrepreneurs that people welcome! Another consideration is the volume of traffic already using the Junction at peak times. More housing equals more traffic. Better traffic management would be essential.

I have to say that Mid Devon's track record at adding new infrastructure is not good. I would cite, as an example the estate developments to the west of Cullompton. Not one shop has been added. There is no parkland. There is no additional access to the M5 other than by the Old Tiverton Road or via Padbrook then through the town centre, thus adding more congestion to an already difficult situation. Poor! I have to add that the proposed development to the east of Junction 28 and the traffic difficulties that will ensue, will be dreaded by anyone accessing that Junction in its present form.

I chose to live in Willand to enjoy village life. Had I wanted to live in a ribbon development crossing several parish boundaries, I would have done so. I am sure that I speak for many others in the village. These proposals not only need refining: they are excessive. There will be many formal objections at every stage if consultation doesn't result in significant changes. Of that I am sure! To return to the original theme: adequate infrastructure first – housing second. Or to put it another way, residents first, developers second!

I conclude as I started: yours is in many ways an onerous job that would be made much easier by following the Cranbrook/Sherford model. I also contend that it would be a greater success!

I wish you well in your endeavours to strike the right balance.

Yours sincerely

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