

Sandra Hutchings

From: Catherine Bass
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To: DPD
Subject: Mid Devon Local plan review

LOCAL PLAN REVIEW OPTIONS CONSULTATION

Comments supplied by
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These comments are submitted on the basis that I have read the full document and have formed an opinion on the overall 'vision' for Mid Devon and as a resident of Culmstock I have specific comments to make about the suggested expansion of the village settlement limit. My early comments will be made in accordance with the numbering system in the document, and reflect my real discomfort at the basis of the development proposals overall.

Visions and Spatial Strategy

1.1 – 1.4 The review period available to the residents has been unrealistically short by comparison with the amount of time that MDDC has allocated to develop, review and agree the plan together with all its options. Regional consultation meetings were over before many parish councils had been able to meet and discuss the Review, let alone send a delegate to seek answers to informed questions. By your own statement you acknowledge that this district is unusual in the proportion of residents living in rural locations which might indicate that local processes be given more time to function – a minimum of four months rather than two months, given that some parish councils may not even have met within that time frame. Your communication plan might have included a mail shot to every household for such an important consultation for example, particularly as it is unclear whether parish council views are actually considered as holding any value.

1.7 Your map is misleading at this point- while the very small part of district overstepped by the Dartmoor National Park Authority is shown in green, the corresponding and significantly larger portion to the north east within the Blackdown Hills AONB is not demarked on this map. Why not, given that the visual aspects of anything developed in the M5 corridor will alter for ever the special visual aspects of the rest of Devon currently afforded from western side of the Blackdown Hills AONB – and not just from an MDDC perspective but also that of Taunton Deane Borough Council and EDDC? Consider not just the daytime impact, but that of night lighting in this area that will compromise the AONB's acknowledged and highly valued Dark Skies status.

1.15 Your mention of the Heritage asset survey here is incorrect – you state that the heritage asset survey closed on January 10 2014. I refer you to your own website <http://www.middevon.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10043>

1.5- 1.30 Facts and Figures. One has to suppose that these data are reasonably accurate. Where however is the evidence suggesting that Mid Devon should attain parity with other District Councils in Devon County – most of the points in this section end with an apparent aspiration to meet the average for other parts of Devon. Why? On what documentation is this pointless competition based?

1.35 The comments made directly above are clearly at odds with the stated objectives of the Sustainability Appraisal which promotes diversity etc.

1.37 Vision & Spatial Strategy is a Utopian dream which in the current climate is unattainable – this statement is a long way from reality, and merely reiterates central government rhetoric over the last 25 years. The false raising

of expectations and failure to meet targets is not encouraging. Why can we not be presented with a realistic assessment and a clear indication that the responsibility for implementation will be down to the locals who care about their own locality.

Vision and Spatial Strategy

MDDC proposes to adhere to the tenets of Sustainable Development – to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future – and yet bases the majority of options on developing the M5 corridor at the entry to one of the UK's most popular holiday destinations. Develop this by all means, if the plan is to match the economic performance of Devon's unitary authorities and EDDC. However ensure that the development is not designed to prioritise the closest possible access from the motorway to huge, overlit industrial estates first and foremost as at Somerset's Sedgemoor development (Morrison's distribution centre), for example. See 1.7 above

In principle the development of existing townships is the more sustainable way to go, rather than obliterating an open landscape at Junction 27 which would inevitably result in an ugly sprawl all the way west to Tiverton, south to Willand and beyond. Develop east of Jn 28, if necessary, in preference, having a care for encroachment on the south west aspects of the AONB.

Specific plans to develop villages, and in particular CULMSTOCK

I am particularly concerned at the proposal to develop Culmstock by extending the current village settlement, and in particular the inclusion of the Glebe lands and Rack fields sites south of the river.

TRAFFIC

In general, Culmstock is considered to be the gateway to the AONB from the west side, with approximately 20% of the parish lying within the AONB boundary.

The village is served by a single road, the B3391, bringing traffic through the village from the A38 in the north to Hemyock to the east, with no fewer than three constricted single track points at Millmoor, the river bridge and the third on leaving Culmstock just inside the 30 delimit at Hillmoor – these constrictions lie either side of the proposed site. This traffic passes my front door on Fore Street, frequently driving on my actual door step. Recent housing developments at Hemyock have already increased this traffic, and heavy traffic is taking its toll in added vibration to the base of walls which are over 400 years old.

Any proposal for development will increase the danger to pedestrians, the Devon Highways Authority has received many Culmstock parish council representations regarding speed, traffic density and safety over the years. The Bridge has suffered much damage from careless traffic use (mostly HGV and agricultural traffic), and school children walking to the primary school located on the North side of the river are at risk throughout the village as there are no pedestrian refuge areas (white lined to warn traffic) on bends or pavements.

If there is to be development in Culmstock, then the more suitable location is north of the River, where the bulk of additional traffic generated will be able to access the A38 without having to go through the Village conservation area at all.

GEOLOGY – GROUNDWATER -DRAINAGE

The underlying geology has created a line of springs at the north side of Hackpen Hill on the lower slopes of which is located the identified site; the houses to the south of the church on Fore Street all lie on the spring line, there are several wells in householders properties . Addition of housing on the higher slopes will result in more surface run off which is already a problem in periods of wet weather. The drainage infrastructure is already woefully inadequate.

LOSS OF VISUAL AMENITY

The proposed development areas will detract seriously from the current conservation area which extends to all the existing housing around the Church, which has 11th century origins, and other houses which are all several hundred years old, with special architectural interest. New housing built at the identified site will loom over the conservation area, reduce the visual impact of the Church with its well known tower tree. The visual impact on arriving in to the currently picturesque village from any direction will be seriously impaired. The southward aspect from all existing houses will be impacted by any development on the rising slope behind the conservation area.

A couple of general points:

In attempting to use your online survey I found it unfit for purpose – the questions posed were inappropriate and assumed outcomes.

I was also present at a parish council meeting in Culmstock on March 18, attended by Mr Jonathan Guscott, and was extremely concerned to learn that a response offered by a parish council – presumably on the consulted and considered view of its parishioners – probably carries no more weight than a response from any individual in any given parish. This is extremely disturbing in view of the current enthusiasm for devolving decision making to a local level.

