

**Sandra Hutchings**

---

**From:** Ben and Nikki Syke:  
**Sent:** 24 March 2014 11:56  
**To:** DPD  
**Subject:** Mid Devon Local Plan Review 2014-2033

Benjamin Sykes  
 The Cleeve  
 The Cleeve  
 Culmstock  
 EX15 3JR



Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to register the following comments on the MDDC local Plan review 2014-2033. I would welcome confirmation of the receipt of this email.

In summary I would like to express my general support for the current MDDC policy of focussing development in urban areas. I do not feel a development at Jct27 is in the best interests of the wider district but that one at Jct 28 would have greater potential to be of benefit. I oppose significant developments in rural areas and in particular strongly oppose proposals for Culmstock especially the large site identified as the "Glebe", to the South of the Development limit. I have set out a more detailed discussion and justification for my views below.

I am generally in support of a continuation of the Council's current policy of focussing development on the urban centres of Mid Devon. I have great concerns about the ability of the rural infrastructure to support large scale development outside of the urban centres, in particular within Mid Devon: the capacity of the highways, but also public transport, waste management and recycling, run off water management, drainage and sewage, education and health provision.

I have no confidence that commercial developers will sufficiently consider, plan and develop the necessary infrastructure to support many of the rural schemes highlighted in the review, either prior to any development or following the generation of their commercial return. Indeed I believe that should a holistic view be taken on the true total cost of many of the rural developments, the stated pre-qualification for inclusion in the plan that they need to be commercially viable, would not be met. It appears that in the Government's attempt to shore up our economy by facilitating more construction, the impact and cost on local infrastructure budgets is not properly accounted for. In particular where councils have statutory duties to provide services to support new populations.

Within the urban centres I think that the opportunity and indeed the obligation to ensure that supporting infrastructure is in place, is more easily achieved and managed. This policy also seems to support more closely what I have read about central government's guiding principles for development which require consideration of the infrastructure factors I have listed above and in addition opportunity for local employment and that this supports low carbon emission commuting - excluding cars, provision of forms of domestic heating other than oil - noted as being most prevalent in rural Mid Devon, access to local retail and leisure services etc. In fact Tiverton is a "Portas" town being identified as requiring support for the town centre. Development in Tiverton would be more likely to make the community more self supporting by bringing it to a "critical mass" of population thereby justifying the provision of services that people desire and expect. Spreading out the population to rural areas increases the use of cars and the likelihood of traveling elsewhere for access to these services - Taunton, Wellington, Exeter and Honiton for example. This also threatens local job opportunities/potential.

Living in Culmstock I am particularly concerned about the proposed developments here. Recent affordable housing schemes seem to have become muddled about their objectives. The village plan spoke of development of affordable housing for support of "displaced" local families and yet the expansion we have seen does not appear to have supported this intention. The Review seems unclear about the full potential for development on the sites identified.

The "Glebe" site appears to have the potential at over 3 hectares to contain nearly 130 houses and yet is earmarked for 25 - this would appear to represent the thin end of a particularly thick wedge which has the potential to change our community beyond recognition. We currently have issues with drainage from run off water and our sewage system seems not to be coping with the current provision. The run off from part of this site currently runs down Hemyock Road and into the gratings at the junction of Fore Street and The Cleeve. It then rises from the gratings lower down The Cleeve as the drain here has collapsed (diagnosed by highway work teams) and floods down my neighbours property and along the front of my house. We have reported this issue a number of times and had site visits from council engineers but we have been told that the priority is low and that it will be "got to when the work crews are next in the areas". This does not demonstrate a sound grip on the infrastructure in place to support developments.

I am also concerned about the opportunity for provision of education. I have a young family and have great anxiety of the effect on the currently excellent education provision locally. I cannot see how the school system can respond positively to the potential for demand from so many new residents.

I am concerned about the impact on the essential character of the rural areas of Mid Devon by the proposals. Indeed much of Culmstock is a conservation area and the "Glebe" site threatens of over shadow and significantly change the character of the village.

My main objection to development in Culmstock has to be the highways. I take exception to the review policy document that makes a statement about the number of vehicles increasing in Mid Devon but the number of "injurious accidents" decreasing. This seems a very biased statistic. In the time frame stated the improvements in vehicle safety have been particularly significant. The report would have been more relevant to state total number of accidents - which in my opinion have become much more notably frequent. There has been much more evidence of damage to banks on the sides of roads, especially on the B3391 from Culmstock to the A38. Sections of which are single lane. After ten years in Culmstock it is noticeably much more difficult to travel on rural routes, and it has been during this time that significant expansion of Hemyock has taken place. The number of "near misses" is increasing. Our neighbour had the porch of her home ripped off by a passing vehicle as was the soffit of the local shop. The brick post of the pedestrian gate outside my property has been removed twice since we have lived here and ultimately I have had to lower it. Our front wall shows the signs of a number of impacts. Much of which is when vehicles heading to Hemyock take a "short cut" up The Cleeve. Walls of the single lane bridge in Culmstock have to be rebuilt at least three times in recent years from vehicle strikes. As have other walls in the village - recently: on the corner opposite the school, a wall on the approach to the church along Hemyock road and a wall on a property adjacent to the bridge. Parking in the roads in the village(s) makes passage much more tricky and last year a telehandler shunted a row of parked cars in the village causing considerable damage. The nature of the traffic in rural areas is different and difficult to that which central government visualise in their policies as it contains: farm vehicles, milk tankers, off road vehicles, trailers etc. mixing these with narrow winding roads is treacherous. The number of times I have been stuck in an "impasse" where two columns of traffic, usually one of which includes a large vehicle, meet on a narrow section of road is now much more frequent. All roads from Culmstock have narrow single lane sections.

Capacity of the highways in Mid Devon is also a consideration for the proposals for the two new communities at Junctions 27 and 28. Placing them near to major transportation links makes a great deal of sense and I am sure that from a commercial point of view the sites look justifiable as well. However I am not sure I believe they are in the best interests of Mid Devon and its population in the long term. Retail development at Junction 27 will "pull the heart out" of Tiverton and Cullompton, massively compromising their development and re-generation. The sort of facilities suggested located at Tiverton would be an enormous boon and potentially only a short extra distance from the M5. Residential development at Junction 27 also threatens to create an imbalance on the development of Mid Devon. It would have a negative impact on local rural communities as well as significantly on Tiverton which would become marginalised.

In my opinion the proposal at Junction 28 makes much more sense. Re-vitalising and justifying development of the community at Cullompton sufficiently separate from Tiverton and with the advantage of being closer to opportunity at Exeter. A Station at Cullompton should be developed to encourage links with Exeter and indeed to easily feed Tiverton Parkway where national connections are provided and where parking is always difficult.

Lastly I am aware of a very recent change in policy regarding the development of agricultural buildings within permitted development rights. This would seem to have the potential for a major impact in Mid Devon. Over the lifetime of the plan until 2033 there is plenty of a time to allow the impact of this new policy on the rural housing stock to emerge. I think it would be naive mismanagement to allow for a local policy of significant rural developments sites to be exploited and to also see from a national policy - out of the control of local government - significant development take place via a less planning process controllable method of permitted development. Allowing both routes could potentially double the impact in rural areas of all the negative aspects previously mentioned. The sensible approach would be to set a policy to understand the impact of this new national policy especially as this would allow time to focus on the population centres first. Indeed the more organic nature of development via agricultural buildings may suit the character of Mid Devon and at a more acceptable pace of change to the residents.

To conclude I would like to express my concerns about the democratic nature of the review process as I do not feel that the review has supported democracy and localism as much as it could have.

The public were not well informed about the existence of the review. In particular the Public Exhibitions: the number of which and scheduling was inadequate. The plan identifies circa 20 villages specifically and yet the Exhibitions were not held in each of these. For illustration, the review has the potential for enormous impact on Culmstock and yet the nearest Exhibition was in Hemyock for a few hours during a working day. I happened not to be working on that day and was able to attend but that was a lucky coincidence. I would have found it much more difficult to miss work otherwise - ironic when the plan is supposed to support employment and the district's economy!

It was difficult at the Exhibition in the time I was able to attend to get a opportunity for discussion with the council representatives as the attending residents of Hemyock were particularly vociferous and monopolised their time. I also noted a particular bias in the demographic of those able to attend - indeed apart from some of the council's representatives I only noted one or two other attendees who appeared to be below retirement age. It was clear to me that an opportunity to get a representative view of local residents was not possible and if the second objective was communication of the plan then I do not think the exhibition was a success either.

For Culmstock it took a special extension of a Parish Council meeting publicised by the Parish Councillors themselves to broadcast the debate about the impact of the plan on our village. I was grateful for MDDC's Mr Guscott attending and he was very professional in his approach to explaining the plan to the circa 100 villagers (of 800 residents) who attended. A number of whom expressed concern about the profile of the review. Regardless of the individual views of the attendees, the attendance showed the high level of interest in the nature of the proposals for the village and demonstrated the strength of our community - something directly under threat from the proposals.

Having attended an exhibition and parish meeting. My next point is about the sheer volume of information to read, interpret and digest. Not just for the local plan but also on the national policies underpinning it. Although I think this demonstrates great transparency of the process. I do not think this completely supports local democracy. Indeed I believe that it heavily weights the process on the side of the development industry and their professional consultants. I note the number of responses to the consultation ending in August and the proportion of these from professional organisations. What worries me is that those who have the the greatest commercial interest can invest in - in some cases geographically distant - professional services who can spend the time sifting through the volume of information available and make detailed submissions full of the correct industry nomenclature and policy references and it remains unclear to me if these submissions therefore carry more weight than local residents of the district most affected by the impact of the outcome. I was also shocked to hear that the committee involved in the pre-selection of potential development sites might include representatives of potential developers.

Yours Faithfully

BJR Sykes

