

**Local Plan Review: Options Consultation**  
Response from L Clunies-Ross



**Response structure**

This response comments on the Review Options and also refers to issues raised in the on-line survey.

**Overview**

Overall, this comprehensive Review offers a number of options for Mid Devon, some of which I believe could work well and others that I consider would endanger the very features that make our area distinctive and attractive to residents and to businesses. It is understood that policy should accord with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) but this should be interpreted with regard to local conditions.

**The Vision and Spatial Strategy** has high ideals, but these are aspirational rather than realistic. In Tiverton, for example the Exe floodplain already has a school, college and hospital as well as homes built on it, the town centre has lost many of its independent shops during the past decade and we still have empty business premises. A big housing estate at Moorhayes does not appear to have affected this situation. Something is not working. This Options Plan is an opportunity to change things, but turning the Vision into a reality for Mid Devon is a huge challenge. Building more homes on valuable farming land is unlikely to provide the answer.

**Policy S1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development**

This is intended to 'meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. I would like to see an additional point included as section c) with reference to the character of the local area. Applications should be considered in relation to their setting, as well as against a list of Government guidelines. (see also Policy S10)

**Policy S2 Sustainable development priorities**

Part c) uses the word 'Ensuring' which begs the question How? By what means? A better word would be 'Building' ....to read 'Building the vitality of town centres... ' Two of the three centres in Mid-Devon are not vibrant now and action is needed to make both Cullompton and Tiverton vibrant again in the future.

Section e) Promoting sustainable transport must include integrating rail/bus interchanges and could, for the growing business community, consider air travel links as well.

Para 2.5 states 'the Council will monitor development...' I believe the Council has a more proactive role to play in positively marketing new business opportunities in Mid-Devon and working to attract high-end businesses to the area.

**Policy S3 Amount and distribution of development**

**Option 1** to centre development on the three main towns, with limited development elsewhere is sensible to start with, but this has a realistic limit due to geography and the need to build strong and balanced communities that are economically viable and retain a sense of identity. As we still have slow take-up of industrial units in Willand and some empty units in Tiverton it is clearly important to market the new industrial

zones, targeting businesses that will bring skilled workers into the area to boost the local economy.

**Policy TIV 2 should be abandoned.** I do not support the sprawl of Tiverton beyond Post Hill. This quality farmland is currently productive, attractive and it also provides an ideal venue for the prestigious Mid-Devon show every summer. Linking Tiverton with Halberton and building up to the edge of the Grand Western Canal does not fulfil the intention of Policy S1. (see above)

There is value in giving towns an identity, a real centre and a balance in housing, employment land and service provision. Adding acres of featureless housing beyond the boundaries is likely to destroy this identity. The value of Masterplanning should seek to prevent such situations.

In developing the three main towns, I am supportive of the ambitious plans for Cullompton and hope that ideas for enhancing J28, building a new railway station, expanding business park opportunities and creating new housing areas above the flood-plain go ahead, alongside the required infrastructure. I do not see a threat to Exeter or Tiverton from such developments.

Crediton's development will follow consolidation of recent positive changes in the town and the proposals appear appropriate in scale.

#### **Policy S3 Option 2 New community**

The notion of a new community after 2026 has appeal, and I support it in principle since by then the main towns are likely to have reached a point where more development would be inappropriate, difficult to implement and may well have an unfortunate impact on the existing community and sense of identity.

But I do not believe that either of the two ideas for the 'new community' is quite right as set out. More thought and work is needed on this important issue.

Basically the area at J27 is ideally placed for a proper fully developed motorway service area, with enhanced hotel/travelodge accommodation and a substantial tourist information facility that could be associated with this (able to make bookings for visitors as well as providing information about West Country attractions). It is well placed 20 miles from J30 in Exeter where the services are regularly overwhelmed on summer weekends. I do not see this as a suitable site for a cinema or conference centre or for a retail outlet. Commercial units would also fit well here alongside existing offices and as this is close to an existing landfill site, upgrading the junction would favour siting any planned waste to energy plant in the northern part of the area, where 24 hour working would not affect any local residents and any emissions would blow over open fields. If these buildings are as pleasing as we are led to believe, this facility could blend into the background. It could receive waste from N Devon via A361 as well as locally and from Somerset via M5. Low cost heating and power could be supplied to the service area and local business community.

Ideas for growing Willand dramatically in this area are not easy to envisage. What might work in the area between J27 and Willand is a large purpose built retirement village in a rural parkland setting. This would retain the attractive rural outlook,

provide local employment and make available housing and other community facilities for an increasingly large sector of the housing market. **Policy DM 14** identifies a need for housing designed for our ageing population and a development such as this could prove ideal for active and less active residents over the age of 60.

It seems to me that current plans for Cullompton are sure to revitalise the town and by 2026 new areas for housing around its margins may have become evident. With J28 enhanced and other new roads in this area this looks like the strongest realistic possibility for new housing, given the level of services and facilities in the area.

**Therefore I support Policy S12** concerning development to the east of the M5 in Cullompton as a strong contender for the new community from 2026.

**Policy S 7 Employment** should target smaller firms including family-run companies and focus on development sites readily accessible from the M5 transport corridor – to be further enhanced by an additional rail link at Cullompton and served I suggest by an integrated bus timetable that provides public transport from both Tiverton and Cullompton rail stations to employment areas. I would encourage the Council to work proactively with and through relevant agencies to promote these new business opportunities in Mid-Devon and not simply monitor what happens.

**Policy S 8 Town Centres** Enhancement of each town centre would benefit from a working party – or at least a public meeting to hear the ideas of the whole community – to consider what local businesses and residents want to see in their town. Council officers and Councillors must also take part to indicate what might be feasible and to indicate funding sources. We need to re-create our towns to become the vibrant centres they once were.

Certainly infrastructure, parking and tourist facilities are critical as well as a mix of shops, flats and where possible public open space for example a square or a market to provide a natural focus. In Tiverton, if access to Fore Street were opened up to the Pannier Market this would serve as a focus for the town centre. At present the Pannier Market is hidden behind some undistinguished modern buildings.

It seems appropriate to re-designate Bampton as a large village but I expect local residents and councillors there will have more informed views to share.

**Policy S9 Infrastructure** It is essential for development and transport planning to be coordinated, with adequate power, drainage and sewerage provided for any new development as well as the more visible access and service roads.

**Policy S 10 Environment** This element is vital and should be a critical part of the assessment of every development application. Thoughtless development can ruin the character of a place and destroy its unique features for good. With care, time and professional skills this policy should help to avoid such catastrophes and seek to retain the character and diversity of this part of mid Devon.

**Policies 11 to 13** My comments on Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton are all included in sections above as appropriate.

**Policy S 14 Villages** I support limited development in the villages so that their character is not changed by big developments that overwhelm them and their services. Assessment of transport, education and convenience stores must be part of this planning in rural areas, with enhancement as required. The views of local residents are important in these plans.

**S 15 Countryside** This appears to take account of the main issues associated with development in the open countryside, given that each application will be judged on its own merits.

**Policy DM 5 Renewable and low-carbon energy** The proposals to develop an area of commerce and industry at J27 could gain a boost if the waste to energy plant were to be located here, on the north of the development, with cheap heating for the development and ready access to the National Grid for surplus electricity.

To conclude, there is much in the Local Plan to give scope for creative development solutions; the challenge is to make it happen.

**L Clunies-Ross**  
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