



MID DEVON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2013 – 2033

Proposed Submission (incorporating proposed modifications) Examination

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Main Hearings - Hearing 3: Friday 15th February 2019 (PM)

Matters and Issues

Site allocations: Crediton and Rural Areas

Statement of Mid Devon District Council

ISSUE 1	Is the approach to Crediton in Draft Policy S12 a reasonable one?
ISSUE 2	Are the allocations and draft policies relating to Crediton (Draft Policies CRE1 to CRE11) workable?
ISSUE 3	Is the approach to rural areas and the countryside in Draft Policies S13 and S14 a reasonable one?
ISSUE 4	Are the various allocations relating to rural areas (save for Draft Policy SP2) sound?

1) Is the approach to Crediton in Draft Policy S12 a reasonable one?

1.1 Yes, the approach to Crediton in Draft Policy S12 is reasonable. The Policy has been prepared in the context of the Spatial Strategy for the plan area where Crediton will be a secondary focus of new development. Policy S12 sets a housing requirement that coupled with the provision of commercial development, infrastructure and other facilities, will enable the town to develop in a sustainable manner. The level of development proposed recognises the environmental and topographical constraints that limit the realistic level of growth achievable. Policy S12 sets out a strategy that aims to improve access to housing within the town, expand employment opportunities and improve the quantity and quality of the existing retail provision. The provisions of Policy S12 enable the Local Plan Review to meet its aim to see Crediton continue to develop as a small and vibrant market town, serving a rural hinterland in the western part of the district.

1.2 As set out in Policy S12, the Local Plan Review sets a requirement of 786 dwellings within Crediton over the plan period, representing 10% of the total requirement for the district of

Mid Devon (7860 dwellings). This requirement is lower than might be expected for a town on this size; however environmental and topographical constraints limit Crediton's expansion. These constraints were identified by the Core Strategy Inspector's Report **[ED01, paragraph 3.4.22]** in which the inspector noted the tightly surrounding hillsides, floodplains and historic parks. Air quality issues and related traffic congestion in the town centre also limit the potential for growth, in particular to the west of the town. In identifying Crediton as a location for a relatively limited level of housing development, the Local Plan review takes a similar approach to the adopted Core Strategy. The strategic approach to Crediton set out in Policy S12 reflects the recognition that development over and above what is proposed can be more sustainably located elsewhere. As a result, the largest Local Plan Review site allocations are in Cullompton based on the availability of suitable land and community support for expansion. The nine housing allocations proposed for Crediton will help deliver the housing requirement set out in Policy S12 alongside windfall development already consented. Policy S12 will help ensure the necessary community and education facilities and other infrastructure required is put in place to support proposed developments.

- 1.3 The town of Crediton is a focal point for the surrounding area, providing a level of employment and services. The Employment Land Review (2013) **[ECO02]** points to a limited demand for employment growth in Crediton. The Local Plan aims to support a sustainable local economy and provide opportunities for new and expanding businesses. While recognising the economic influence exerted by Exeter on Crediton, including the need to travel for employment, it is important to make provision for local employment opportunities. In light of this, 9820 square metres of commercial floorspace is proposed to be allocated within Crediton. This is considered a reasonable approach, supporting a modest level of employment growth that will complement the existing provision at the Lords Meadow Industrial Estate and elsewhere.
- 1.4 The Retail Study (2012) **[ECO03]** identifies no requirement for additional retail floorspace within the town. However, the Local Plan aims to promote a vibrant town centre that can continue to offer services that support the town and wider area. Policy S12 therefore sets out that proposals which improve the quantity and quality of existing retail provision within the town centre will be supported; development management and town centre initiatives will play a key role in this.
- 1.5 The town centre conservation area reflects the historic core of the town which is principally focused around the High Street. Policy S12 requires that development proposals will need to contribute positively to the quality of the built environment of the town centre and wider area. Development will need to respect the setting provided by the open hillsides as well as local heritage assets such as the adjoining historic parklands.
- 1.6 In 2006 Crediton was designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) as a result of unacceptably high levels of airborne pollutants in the centre of the town. An Action Plan **[ENV23]** was drawn up by the Council's Environmental Health Services, outlining the options and further investigations available to tackle the pollution levels, particularly those linked to road traffic emissions. A key element of the Action Plan was a link road between the A377

on the eastern side of the town and the Lords Meadow Industrial Estate which opened in 2014. The latest data on air quality provided in the Annual Status Report (August 2018)¹ recognises the contribution of the link road to improved air quality readings in the town centre. The report recommends that if levels of Nitrogen Dioxide and Particulate Matter continue to stabilise below the targets in the coming years, the Council should consider revocation of the Crediton AQMA. Notwithstanding this, the Council will continue to monitor air quality levels in Crediton and through Policy S12 support measures such as enhancing walking and cycling opportunities that will contribute to improving air quality and help bring wider benefits to the town and local area.

- 1.7 The Local Plan Review recognises the role of tourism in the local economy and the importance of providing the facilities that will attract visitors to towns such as Crediton and the surrounding areas. Policy S12 aims to promote the viability and vitality of the town by providing support for the development and enhancement of cultural and tourist facilities as well as other key town centre uses.

2) Are the allocations and draft policies relating to Crediton (Draft Policies CRE1 to CRE11) workable?

- 2.1 Yes, the allocations and draft policies relating to Crediton are workable. All sites in Crediton proposed for allocation in the Local Plan Review have been deemed suitable, available and achievable as part of the SHLAA or SCLAA² process. As such, the land to which the proposed allocations relate has been confirmed as available by landowners and it is anticipated that the sites will come forward within an appropriate time frame (within the plan period and where appropriate within the next five years). A number of the sites proposed for allocation in Crediton have now come forward for development and have planning permission or are subject to planning applications. Further evidence to support the deliverability of the allocations proposed for Crediton, in terms of anticipated start dates and build out rates, is considered in the Housing Land Supply Paper appended to Hearing Statement 1.5. .

- 2.2 The SHLAA and SCLAA panels have advised on the deliverability of sites and have worked with the Council to consider ways to overcome any identified constraints. The proposed allocations have been through a sustainability appraisal (SA) process which considered reasonable alternatives and have been subject to public consultation at various stages of the plan-making process. The requirements of each policy have been identified based on sound and detailed evidence and clearly set out what is expected from development proposals in order to deliver the positive outcomes sought. The Affordable Housing requirements set out in each policy have been subject to viability testing [HOU04/HOU06].

- 2.3 An overview of the key issues considered and addressed through the SA and consultation processes for each proposed allocation is provided in Appendix A (housing allocations) and

¹ https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/346132/6994_6978_mid-devon-asr-v2.pdf

² Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and Strategic Commercial Land Availability Assessment (SCLAA)

Appendix B (employment allocations). These summaries provide an outline of the key evidence that informed the selection of particular sites as proposed Local Plan Review allocations. Further detailed evidence is provided in the documents that make up the Local Plan Review Examination Library, including the Sustainability Appraisal [SD04 – SD06] and consultation summaries [SD10 – SD11].

- 2.4 Where appropriate, policy requirements for the proposed allocation sites have been amended in response to consultation. For example, Historic England raised concerns regarding the impact of proposed allocations on historic parklands and other heritage assets in and around Crediton. In response to Historic England’s comments, a Historic Environment Appraisal (HEA) [ENV25] for all proposed plan allocations has been carried out. Where applicable, amendments or additions have been made to the policy requirements for the proposed Crediton allocations following the HEA. A number of the policies therefore make provision for significant green infrastructure and other landscaping in order to mitigate impact on historic parklands and other heritage assets. In addition, in response to consultation feedback, policies have been further strengthened where appropriate to include the requirement for the provision of improved pedestrian and cycle access to the town centre. Further information on policy amendments in response to consultation feedback is provided in Appendix A.
- 2.5 The vast majority of allocated development is to the east of the town, reflecting the limitations on development to the west, in particular in relation to traffic congestion through the town centre and the resulting air quality impacts discussed above (under Issue 1, paragraph 1.6). While the new link road has had a positive impact on air quality by diverting traffic travelling between the east of town and the Lords Meadow Industrial estate, development to the west of the town would continue to result in additional traffic travelling through the town centre. As such, the Council would not want to jeopardise the recent improvements identified in town centre air quality.
- 2.6 The Local Plan Review proposes to allocate the two larger Crediton housing sites allocated in the currently adopted Local Plan: Wellparks (Local Plan Review reference CRE1) and Red Hill Cross (CRE2). These sites have previously found to be suitable for development through a Local Plan Examination process. Wellparks (CRE1) has planning permission for 185 dwellings and development of the site commenced in July 2017. The Council is satisfied that there is a good prospect of the site at Red Hill Cross (CRE2 - 135 dwellings) coming forward in the near future. In addition Pedlerspool (CRE5), which was included in the AIDPD as a contingency site, is proposed for allocation in the Local Plan Review. In September 2018, the Council’s planning committee considered an application for development at the Pedlerspool site (CRE5) of up to 257 dwellings. It was resolved that outline permission be granted subject to the signing of a Section 106 agreement which would secure the setting out of a site for up to 5 Gypsy and Traveller pitches and new sports facilities to allow the relocation of Crediton Rugby Club. Concerns were raised by objectors regarding the provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches at the CRE5 site; these issues are dealt with in the site summaries in Appendix A. The ‘Sports Field, Exhibition Road’ allocation (CRE6 – 120 dwellings) comprises the pitches and facilities currently used by Crediton Rugby Club; relocation of the club to the

Pedlerspool site (CRE5) would free up this site for residential development. Given that the availability of this site (CRE6) is tied to the development of the Pedlerspool site (CRE5), it is expected that the CRE6 site will come forward later in the plan period.

- 2.7 The four sites discussed above represent the larger proposed housing allocations for Crediton. There are five other smaller allocations proposed for Crediton which make up the remainder of the total allocated provision for the town and are considered to be deliverable over the plan period.
- 2.8 The provision of commercial floor space within Crediton is spread across two proposed allocated sites, both on the eastern side of the town close to the A377 and new link road. The larger site (CRE10 – 7,600 square metres) is on land south of the A377, adjacent to existing retail and commercial development. In addition 2,200 square metres of commercial floorspace is allocated as part of the proposed mixed-use allocation at Wellparks (CRE1).
- 2.9 Information on the current status of all proposed allocation sites in Crediton is provided in Appendix A (housing) and Appendix B (employment); this provides further evidence to support the contention that these proposed allocations are workable.
- 2.10 In total, the Local Plan proposes to allocate 9,820 square metres of commercial floorspace in Crediton. Once completions since 2013 and current commitments are taken into account, total provision for Crediton is slightly less than the indicative requirement of 14,700 square metres (based on 10% of the overall plan requirement); however other areas are allocated more than their indicative requirement and the overall the Local Plan Review provision for commercial floorspace more than meets the total requirement of 147,000 square metres. The overall provision for Crediton is considered reasonable given the development strategy for Crediton set out in Policy S12 and the opportunities for development in the town.
- 2.11 In total 768 dwellings are proposed to be allocated in Crediton, although based on current commitments (dwellings with permission or under construction), allocations are expected to deliver slightly in excess of this (782). This is broadly in line with the indicative Local Plan requirement figure for Crediton. Once consented and previously completed windfall development is taken into account, it is expected that the total housing provision for Crediton over the plan period (2013-2033) will be 979 dwellings. This figure is over 25% more than the Local Plan Review requirement for Crediton so provides flexibility and a buffer against under delivery.

Policy CRE11

- 2.12 Policy CRE11 sets out the infrastructure that the Council will seek to secure funding for in Crediton through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), planning obligations or other sources. Example of infrastructure improvements set out in Policy CRE11 include (amongst others); enhanced pedestrian and cycle facilities, air quality improvements, public open space and community facilities. Strategic Local Plan sites will be required to pay for specific items of infrastructure that are necessary to make the development acceptable. The Council's strategic infrastructure policy is set out under Policy S8 with requirements specific

to Crediton identified in Policy CRE11. As set out in Policy S8, developers will be expected to contribute fairly towards, or bear the full cost of, new or improved infrastructure and facilities where it is appropriate for them to do so. Contributions will be subject to viability assessment where appropriate. Delivery of required infrastructure will in certain instances involve the Council working in partnership with external organisations. The Council will set out key infrastructure and facility requirements for new developments in an Infrastructure Plan which will include information about the means of funding.

- 2.13 Improving local pedestrian and cycling facilities has been identified as a key aim of the Neighbourhood Plan Forum and Town Council. In line with this aim, the Town Council has commissioned a feasibility study to develop a series of conceptual design options aimed at improving the urban realm. The designs aim to improve walkability, traffic behaviour and bus movements, improve the urban realm and address air quality and other environmental issues. It is anticipated that contributions secured through Section 106 agreements or future CIL charges will help fund some of these proposals.

3) Is the approach to rural areas and the countryside in Draft Policies S13 and S14 a reasonable one?

- 3.1 Yes, the approach to rural areas and the countryside in Draft Policies S13 and S14 is reasonable. Policies S13 and S14 together take a flexible approach to development in rural areas and the countryside, one that is not overly restrictive but provides protection for the intrinsic qualities and characteristics of these areas. Policies S13 and S14 will help ensure that the specific housing and employment needs of rural areas are met and promote sustainable development that enhances or maintains the vibrancy and character of rural communities.
- 3.2 Mid Devon is a predominantly rural district; the majority of its settlements, including a number of historic villages and smaller hamlets sit within a unique rural landscape. More than half of Mid Devon's population currently resides outside the main towns. Policy S13 and S14 therefore play a key role in setting a strategy that responds to the needs of the district.
- 3.3 Rural areas are expected to accommodate approximately 10% of the housing requirement for Mid Devon up to 2033. This is a reasonable approach given the opportunities for development in rural areas; the Local Plan typically allocates smaller sites within more sustainable rural settlements, while development is restricted outside of these settlements. The development on allocated rural sites is also expected to be complemented by windfall developments within settlement limits or delivered through the rural exceptions policy (Policy DM6). The proposed level of development will help support the vitality of rural areas without harming their character or putting undue pressure on local infrastructure.

NPPF and rural development

- 3.4 NPPF (2012) paragraph 28 states that ‘Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.’ Paragraph 54 states ‘local planning authorities should be responsive to local circumstances and plan housing development to reflect local needs, particularly for affordable housing, including through rural exception sites where appropriate. Local planning authorities should in particular consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.’ Paragraph 55 continues: ‘To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities...’

Historic policy context and affordable/market housing provision

- 3.5 The Inspector’s report for the examination of the Core Strategy **[ED01]** noted the change in emphasis from previous Local Plans in seeking to reduce levels of development in rural locations. For example, it reduced the number of designated villages from 47 to 21 and no longer made provision for market housing in villages through allocations. It was envisaged that market housing would continue to come forward on windfall sites through minor proposals within settlement limits.
- 3.6 The Local Plan Review **[SD01]** continues with some elements of the Core Strategy **[LDO01]** approach to rural areas but differs in certain key aspects. The LPR retains a focus on delivery of affordable housing to meet local needs, in part through its allocations and also through Policy DM6 (rural exceptions) which makes provision for housing developments outside defined settlements where predominantly affordable or low cost housing is proposed to meet proven local need. Unlike the Core Strategy, the Local Plan Review proposes a certain level of market housing on allocated rural sites, in line with national policy and supported by viability evidence.

Policy S13

- 3.7 Policy S13 (Villages) identifies a number of settlements within the district which do not function as market towns, but which provide a limited level of services which support vibrant rural communities. These are locations which are suitable for a limited level of development meeting local needs appropriate to their individual opportunities. Policy S13 allows for development within settlement limits and on allocated sites for: small scale housing, employment, tourism and leisure uses, local services and facilities and other limited development which enhances the vitality of communities or meets local social or economic needs.
- 3.8 As set out in Policy S13 of the Local Plan Review, there are 22 settlements considered to be appropriate for a limited level of development, based on their physical characteristics, and the availability of the following three essential services: educational facility, convenience store and transport service. Some villages will have greater potential than others to accommodate development given their size, existing services and facilities. However, Policy S13 does not fix the required level of development for each village; ‘grading’ of the

designated villages would be considered an overly prescriptive approach, as such a more flexible approach to meeting the housing needs of rural communities is preferred. In light of this, allocations have been assessed individually based on availability of land, general suitability for development and site specific characteristics. Overall the allocations are considered to provide a suitable range of provision across the rural areas of the district. The definition of 'small scale' development in Policy S13 also allows for a degree of flexibility by enabling the consideration of proposals in their specific context; this allows for larger allocations in the more appropriate village locations.

- 3.9 There are some changes to the settlements which are designated under Policy S13 from the corresponding Core Strategy Policy (COR17). Burlescombe/Westleigh is no longer a designated settlement under Policy S13, while Holcombe Rogus is considered suitable to be added to the list as a designated village. In addition, Bampton has been added to the S13 designated list, having previously been classified as a town.
- 3.10 Bampton meets the essential criteria identified in Policy S13 and has similar characteristics to other settlements identified as villages in this plan, including a similar parish population size. In light of this and in response to consultation feedback, Bampton has been re-classified to match the designated villages in Mid Devon. This approach ensures that development will still be provided in Bampton but at a level appropriate to its individual opportunities.
- 3.11 Historically, employment sites in rural areas across Mid Devon have been delivered primarily through windfall sites, with limited provision on allocated land. The Council recognise the importance of supporting economic growth in rural areas and enhancing the vitality of rural communities through the provision of rural employment opportunities. Policy S13, alongside permitted development rights and other supportive policies within the Local Plan Review, helps support this objective. The Local Plan Review proposes small employment allocations in Bampton and Willand and will continue to support suitable commercial development on non-allocated sites in rural areas subject to demand. Policy S13 also recognises the important role of tourism and leisure to Mid Devon's rural economy.
- 3.12 Overall, Policy S13 sets out a positive strategy for the sustainable development of the district's rural communities, ensuring that housing development is located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. The policy provides a flexible approach that, in conjunction with Policy DM6, helps to meet the specific housing needs of rural communities, particularly for affordable housing. The Policy also makes provision for employment, tourism and leisure uses and other facilities and services that will help support vibrant and sustainable rural communities.

Policy S14

- 3.13 Policy S14 (Countryside) sets out the approach to development outside of the main towns and the villages designated under Policy S13 (see above). This aims to preserve and where possible enhance the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside while promoting sustainable diversification of the rural economy.

- 3.14 Policy S14 sets out the type of development that will be permitted through detailed development management policies. This includes affordable and low cost housing to meet local needs (DM6), residential conversions (where appropriate), replacement dwellings and housing to accommodate rural workers. Appropriately scaled retail, employment, farm diversification, tourism and leisure related development will also be permitted. Other types of development and infrastructure appropriate to a rural setting are also set out in the policy criteria.
- 3.15 Development in the countryside will be managed to meet local need, promote vibrant rural communities and help provide appropriate forms of agriculture and rural diversification to support the rural economy and sustain the environmental qualities of the countryside. Development management policies allow for small-scale employment development in suitable locations whilst retaining the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. These sites can come forward according to market demand. Policy S13, alongside development management policies, therefore responds positively to national policy which supports thriving rural communities and promotes the sustainable growth of business and enterprise in rural areas.
- 3.16 In accordance with national policy, the Local Plan Review seeks to promote sustainable patterns of development, in particular taking account of a location's accessibility by sustainable transport modes. As such development in more remote areas would generally not be in line with sustainable development goals. New isolated homes will be avoided in the countryside unless there are special circumstances as set out in national policy and supplemented in relevant Local Plan policies such as Policy DM6 (rural exception sites), DM8 (rural workers dwellings) and DM9 (conversion of rural buildings). In the context of the Mid Devon Local Plan, 'isolated' refers to any location outside of defined settlement limits. Such land is defined as the countryside which can include small settlements and hamlets.
- 3.17 Mid Devon's rural areas include a small part of Dartmoor National Park and the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). National policy accords the highest status of protection to the landscape and scenic beauty of these areas; the Local Plan Review provides additional protection for these areas under Policy DM27 (Protected Landscapes).
- 3.18 Overall, Policy S14 provides a reasonable approach that, alongside Policy S13 and development management policies, supports a strong rural economy, provides housing to meet identified local needs and protects the environmental qualities and character of the countryside.

4) Are the various allocations relating to rural areas (save for Draft Policy SP2) sound?

- 4.1 Yes, the allocations relating to rural areas are sound. All sites in rural areas proposed for allocation in the Local Plan Review have been deemed suitable, available and achievable as part of the SHLAA or SCLAA³ process. As such, the land to which the proposed allocations

³ Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and Strategic Commercial Land Availability Assessment (SCLAA)

relate has been confirmed as available by landowners and it is anticipated that the sites will come forward within an appropriate time frame (within the plan period and where appropriate within the next five years). A number of the sites proposed for allocation in the rural areas have now come forward for development and have planning permission or are subject to planning applications. Further evidence to support the deliverability of the allocations proposed for rural areas, in terms of anticipated start dates and build out rates, is considered in the Housing Land Supply Paper appended to Hearing Statement 1.5.

- 4.2 The SHLAA and SCLAA panels have advised on the deliverability of sites and have worked with the Council to consider ways to overcome any identified constraints. The proposed allocations have been through a sustainability appraisal (SA) process which considered reasonable alternatives and have been subject to public consultation at various stages of the plan-making process. The requirements of each policy have been identified based on sound and detailed evidence and clearly set out what is expected from development proposals in order to deliver the positive outcomes sought. The Affordable Housing requirements set out in each policy have been subject to viability testing [**HOU04/HOU06**].
- 4.3 An overview of the key issues considered and addressed through the SA and consultation processes for each proposed allocation is provided in Appendix C (housing allocations) and Appendix D (employment allocations). These summaries provide an outline of the key evidence that informed the selection of particular sites as proposed Local Plan Review allocations. Further detailed evidence to support the selection of sites is provided in the documents that make up the Local Plan Review Examination Library, including the Sustainability Appraisal [**SD04 – SD06**] and consultation summaries [**SD10 – SD11**].
- 4.4 Allocations within the rural areas are limited to the designated villages identified under Policy S13. There are 26 proposed allocations for housing in rural areas, ranging in size from 5 to 60 units. Most allocations within villages are expected to deliver around 20 dwellings per hectare due to the low density character of existing village development, although in some cases a higher or lower density is justified. The level of development within each village will depend on land availability, the specific characteristics of the available land and the suitability of the site within the context of the village considering its size and level of services. The Local Plan generally allocates smaller sites for housing within the villages, the development of which will help to support the vitality of rural areas without harming their character or putting undue pressure on local infrastructure. Where designated villages have no allocated development, further explanation is provided in Appendix C.
- 4.5 The allocations relating to rural villages help contribute to the housing needs of the district's rural areas. Against a requirement of 786 dwellings, the Local Plan makes provision for 1627 dwellings in rural areas over the plan period, including completed, committed and allocated development. Windfalls account for over 1000 of this total, demonstrating the potential for small sites which are not allocated in the Local Plan to make a significant contribution to housing delivery in rural areas.
- 4.6 The Local Plan Review retains small employment allocations in Bampton and Willand as these sites are already permitted or well-connected to existing commercial uses and

infrastructure. In general, site allocations within the towns meet the overall target for commercial development across the district, providing flexibility and choice in the market.

- 4.7 Information on the current status of all proposed allocation sites in the rural areas is provided in Appendix C (housing) and Appendix D (employment); this provides further evidence to support the contention that these proposed allocations are sound.