



MID DEVON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2013 – 2033
Proposed Submission (incorporating proposed modifications) Examination
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Main Hearings - Hearing 5a : Wednesday 20th February 2019

Matters and Issues

J27

Statement of Mid Devon District Council

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| ISSUE 1 | In the light of conclusions that flowed from the Preliminary Hearings, is the wording of Draft Policy J27 (Land at Junction 27 of the M5 Motorway) too restrictive? |
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1.0 Policy J27 - Wording

1.1 The conclusions drawn from the preliminary hearings in respect of J27 are:

*“There are some preliminary conclusions that it might be useful to share, at this stage. In terms of Policy J27, I am obviously conscious of advice in (the previous version of) the Framework that Plans should be aspirational but realistic. In that context, I see no ‘in principle’ difficulty with the allocation. Moreover, from what I heard, **it seems that a development of the nature proposed (or something broadly similar) could take place without any significant adverse impacts on the economic, social, or environmental dimensions of sustainable development.** That said, bearing in mind the nature of the evidence base, **I have some reservations about the detailed and specific nature of the policy as drafted, and the way it seems to be directed at a particular scheme, rather than more generally at a tourism-based development. This may have the effect of preventing other schemes, that take a different approach to the site, or the mix of uses on it, coming forward.** I propose therefore to address this point, and the precise wording of the policy, in one of Main Hearings.”*

1.2 Mid Devon have highlighted the two sentences in **bold** which are the two key sentences of the paragraph. The first sentence indicates that a development of the nature proposed or (broadly similar) could take place on the J27 allocation site without significant adverse impacts. This is welcomed by the Council.

1.3 The second sentence specifically highlights the concern that the policy is perhaps too detailed and specific rather than more generally tourism based and this may have the effect of preventing a scheme coming forward that takes a different approach to the site.

1.5 Mid Devon District Council are keen to maintain tight control over development that takes place at Junction 27. The Council see this prime location as a key development opportunity for the development of a multi-faceted tourism and leisure attraction close to the M5/A361 interchange and close to a mainline railway. It will require an individual product providing a ‘major’ tourism destination that can compete in the market. To do less at J27 would be a wasted opportunity of this unique locational opportunity. The ambition to make a step-change in the tourism-offer in Mid Devon requires the development of a multi-faceted facility for the region and for the type of attraction that is identified in the allocation. The Council are keen to ensure the allocation policy clearly sets out the quantum and types of development that will be acceptable on the J27 allocation site.

1.6 The Council accept some variation make take place as the result of the detailed master planning but that variation will be controlled and the resulting development will continue to be multifaceted and high quality as envisaged by the policy.

1.7 Is the policy too restrictive, the Council do not consider it to be so for the reasons set out below.

1.8 *The Travel Hub* – this make take a variety of forms and provisions. Travel hubs can vary considerably in nature form and type. As we move towards more electric and possibly self-driving vehicles the 2025 travel hub may be substantially different from those previously planned.

- 1.9 *Agronomy Visitor Centre* – is themed around agriculture and the agri-economy, one of the west country’s primary industries, but how that is delivered is not defined. The policy makes provision for a visitor centre providing an exhibition space and a hall which both offer a wide variety of opportunities for how that space is utilised, a gallery, research and education space and a regional visitor centre all of which offer many unique opportunities in the facilities they provide. The Agronomy centre allocation covers approximately 9ha which again offers numerous opportunities for how an agri based visitor attraction is set up, provided and designed. The only restriction is the visitor attraction must be themed around Agronomy. This provides enormous scope for a unique attraction.
(Appendix A - A brief summary to the wide scope of the life science of Agronomy)

There are many examples of life science visitor centres elsewhere which operate successfully around a variety of related themes examples are:-

- Eden Cornwall – Botanical based attraction,
- Museum of Welsh Life, Cardiff,
- Black Country Living Museum, Dudley
- Centre for alternative technology , Machynlleth, Wales
- W5 Interactive Discovery Centre, Belfast
- Oceanopolis, Brest, Brittany, Ocean life based attraction,
- Newcastle Life Science, Centre

- 1.10 Agricultural related tourism is a form of tourism that is considered a growth industry. People have become more interested in how their food is produced, what processes are involved and what goes into food production. For many people visits of this nature mark the first time they see the source of their food, how it is put together, the risks involved, particularly those facing world food production in the global market, food security, climate change. Additionally people are developing an interest in future patterns of food production and types of food production and what provision there will be in the future. J27 allocation is ideally place to provide a life science centre of this kind, it has a large open site available to it which readily lends itself to an agricultural life science themed attraction. Being able to try and buy what they see is also a key attraction of facilities of this kind. The policy makes provision for 1,000 sq metres of ancillary retail space and hotel accommodation. While one promoter has put forward their vision of how they would seek to provide this, the scope of this attraction is plenty wide enough to suggest other tourism and visitor attraction operators would be willing to take the visitor attraction element of the scheme forward as part of a much wider multifaceted facility. The site is unlikely to be developed by one operator, it is more likely to be brought forward by a consortium of developers each bringing forward their particular part in conjunction with the others.
- 1.11 The Council consider there is significant scope within the policy provisions to allow a wide variety operators to develop this opportunity at J27
- 1.12 *Outdoor adventure zone* – identifies some specific outdoor adventure uses but the policy provision is for an outdoor adventure zone and the surf park element is only a part of that, that element and indeed the reminder of the outdoor adventure provision may take a variety of forms.
- 1.13 *Outlet Shopping Village* - finally the policy makes provision for an Outlet Shopping Village a key element of the multifaceted attraction the Council seek to develop at J27. Clear unchallenged evidence was given at the preliminary hearings on the importance of this

element being a key part of the combined attraction, not only in terms of its synergy with the other elements in terms of providing for all age groups in all weathers, but also a key element in viability and deliverability if the attraction is to come forward as a comprehensive whole.

- 1.14 Policy amendments have been put forward by GL Hearn representing Friends life Ltd (now represented by Rapleys) but they do not change the principle elements of the policy. MDDC do not agree GL Hearn's proposed modifications.
- 1.15 Willand District Council's representation also contained proposed policy modifications. These seek to remove all the specific provisions of Policy J27 leaving just the allocation of a site for exceptional leisure and tourist development. They also wish to remove any reference to retail development. The Council consider without providing some specific guidance, Policy J27 becomes available for any type of tourism and leisure provision. This the Council consider gives insufficient control. Removing the retail outlet village also raises questions over deliverability and viability and whether such an open worded policy would deliver the multi-faceted facility the Council seek at J27.
- 1.17 The Council consider the J27 policy provisions are not unreasonably detailed or too specific to prevent a development coming forward at J27. The Council ask that Policy J27 be retained as currently written.

Appendix A

A brief summary to the wide scope of the life science of Agronomy.

Agronomy is the science and technology of producing and using plants for food, fuel, fiber, and land reclamation. Agronomy has come to encompass work in the areas of plant genetics, plant physiology, meteorology, and soil science and some definitions of agriculture include fisheries, forestry and other activities. It is the application of a combination of sciences like biology, chemistry, economics, ecology, earth science, and genetics. Agronomists of today are involved with many issues, including producing food, creating healthier food, managing the environmental impact of agriculture, and extracting energy from plants. Agronomists often specialise in areas such as crop rotation, irrigation and drainage, plant breeding, plant physiology, soil classification, soil fertility, weed control, and insect and pest control

Agronomy involves selective breeding of plants to produce the best crops under various conditions. Plant breeding has increased crop yields and has improved the nutritional value of numerous crops, including corn, soybeans, and wheat. It has also led to the development of new types of plants. For example, a hybrid grain called triticale was produced by crossbreeding rye and wheat. Triticale contains more usable protein than does either rye or wheat. Agronomy has also been instrumental in fruit and vegetable production research

Agronomists use biotechnology to extend and expedite the development of desired characteristic. Biotechnology is often a lab activity requiring field testing of the new crop varieties that are developed.

In addition to increasing crop yields agronomic biotechnology is increasingly being applied for novel uses other than food. For example, oilseed is at present used mainly for margarine and other food oils, but it can be modified to produce fatty acids for detergents, substitute fuels and petrochemicals.

Agronomists study sustainable ways to make soils more productive and profitable throughout the world. They classify soils and analyze them to determine whether they contain nutrients vital to plant growth. Common macronutrients analyzed include compounds of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and sulfur. Soil is also assessed for several micronutrients, like zinc and boron. The percentage of organic matter, soil pH, and nutrient holding capacity (cation exchange capacity) are tested in a regional laboratory. Agronomists will interpret these lab reports and make recommendations to balance soil nutrients for optimal plant growth.¹

In addition, agronomists develop methods to preserve the soil and to decrease the effects of erosion by wind and water. For example, a technique called contour plowing may be used to prevent soil erosion and conserve rainfall. Researchers in agronomy also seek ways to use the soil more effectively in solving other problems. Such problems include the disposal of human and animal manure, water pollution, and pesticide build-up in the soil. As well as looking after the soil for future generations to come, such as the burning of paddocks after crop production.

Agroecology is the management of agricultural systems with an emphasis on ecological and environmental perspectives. This area is closely associated with work in the areas of sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and alternative food systems and the development of alternative cropping systems.

Theoretical production ecology tries to quantitatively study the growth of crops. The plant is treated as a kind of biological factory, which processes light, carbon dioxide, water, and nutrients into harvestable products. The main parameters considered are temperature, sunlight, standing crop biomass, plant production distribution, and nutrient and water supply.

Marine agronomy deals with similar issues to those on land but relates to the marine and aquatic environments.