



MID DEVON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2013 – 2033

Proposed Submission (incorporating proposed modifications) Examination

Inspector: Paul Griffiths BSc (Hons) BArch IHBC

Main Hearings - Hearing 2: Friday 15th February 2019

Matters and Issues

Strategy and Site Allocations: Tiverton and Cullompton

ISSUE 1 Is the approach to Tiverton in Draft Policy S10 a reasonable one?

1) Is the approach to Tiverton in Draft Policy S10 a reasonable one?

- 1.1 Yes, the approach to Tiverton in Draft Policy S10 is a reasonable one.
- 1.2 Tiverton is the largest settlement in Mid Devon, with the largest economic concentration and level of social and commercial services. The town stands at the confluence of the Rivers Exe and Lowman and is located within the steeply rolling landform of the Exe Valley, a typically hilly undulating landscape. The M5 motorway lies to the east of the town with links to Taunton onto Bristol and Exeter although the A361 passes close to the town centre, on its northern side providing good links to North Devon and the M5.
- 1.3 Tiverton has a population of approximately 22,177 (DCC PPSA Estimates 2014) **[MID05]** and is one of the most self-sufficient towns in Devon. Over 50% of the population work within the town and half of these currently walk or cycle to work. The largest employment sector in Tiverton is retail, accounting for nearly 16% of total employee jobs. Within the town there are also a number of engineering companies, as well as Heathcoat (textiles), which is a major local employer **[ECO02]**.
- 1.4 The Plan stipulates that within Tiverton, approximately 2,358 dwellings are required over the plan period, which equates to approximately 30% of the total plan requirement. In addition, the Plan sets a target of 29,400 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The proposals within the Plan provide for approximately 2,546 dwellings and 40,355 gross square metres of commercial floor space over the plan period. The majority of this will be accommodated

within an eastern urban extension (Policies TIV1-5), with the remainder provided by smaller allocations (TIV6-TIV16). One contingency sites (TIV13) has also been allocated within the town, forming part of the strategy for providing flexibility within the plan.

- 1.5 Tiverton has the second largest plan requirement (approximately 30% of the Local Plan requirement). Whilst it is the largest settlement and administrative centre in Mid Devon, there are fewer developable sites.

History – Planning Policy Context

- 1.6 Within the Council’s adopted Core Strategy **[LDO01]**, Tiverton was identified as the main location for new housing and employment development within the district, reflecting its size, level of economic concentration, level of social and commercial services and public transport provision. The Inspector at that time agreed with this approach and concluded that it was reasonable to allocate about half of the proposed development to the town. The Core Strategy Inspector’s Report **[ED01]** also noted that *‘in terms of physical constraints there are fairly tight limitations to development to the south and west. To the north the North Devon Link Road provides a strong barrier, breaching of which would be a significant departure from previous approaches. The main opportunity to deliver the scale of new development proposed clearly lies to the east...’*
- 1.7 The Allocations and Infrastructure Development Plan Document (AIDPD) **[LDO02]** implements the Core Strategy through allocations of land for development and infrastructure. Consequently, the AIDPD allocates a site of 153 hectares to the east of Tiverton for mixed use development including 1550 – 2000 dwellings and 95,000 – 130,000 square metres employment floor space. This site along with other smaller allocations culminated in Tiverton forming the greatest focus for development within the adopted Mid Devon Local Plan.
- 1.8 Paragraphs 1.16, 2.21 and 2.22 of the Local Plan Review **[SD01]** provide a detailed explanation for the strategic approach to the distribution of growth throughout the district. Clearly the approach set out in the Local Plan Review (i.e. Cullompton’s role in meeting the district’s long term development needs) is a *“departure from the Council’s historic planning strategy which focussed the majority of development in Tiverton, commensurate with the size and sub-regional role of the town.”*) This reflects the fact that Tiverton’s topography constraints growth to only two directions, firstly north of the A361 and secondly to the east along the valley. The Council has explored land availability to the north and has received confirmation that this is not available. To the east the only option is Hartnoll Farm which is available and of significant scale to bring forward major housing and employment growth. However the 2015 SA **[SA04a-e]** identifies a number of significant constraints. Development in this location would have a negative effect on the landscape character of Mid Devon; the site is bordered by the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area, County Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve. There are also significant coalescence concerns with the village of Halberton which has its own distinct identity. The rationale underpinning the Council’s distribution of development is set out in more detail in the 2015 Sustainability Appraisal **[SD04a-e]** and the Housing Topic Paper **[TPA01]**.

Policy S10: Tiverton

- 1.9 The policy approach for Tiverton is a product of the Town’s evolution and growth over time and has been formulated on this basis. For the reasons outlined above, the Local Plan Review **[SD01] Policy S10** envisages that *“Tiverton will continue to develop in a balanced way as a medium sized market town, maintaining its status as the largest urban area in Mid Devon and serving a rural hinterland in the central part of the district and to the north.* Policy S10 aims to increase the self-sufficiency of the town and its area by improving access to housing, employment and services for its population and that of the surrounding rural areas.
- 1.10 The policy sets out a range of criteria to facilitate this. Each criterion is discussed in detail below:
- 1.11 Criterion a) focusses on managing the town centre, reflecting the conclusions of the Retail Study 2012 **[ECO03]** which identified a qualitative and quantitative need for additional comparison goods floorspace and recommended that the focus for this should be within the Phoenix Lane area. This approach is consistent with paragraph 23 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) which encourages local planning authorities to allocate suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres.
- 1.12 Criterion b) promotes enhanced walking and cycling opportunities and bus services around the town. The Transport Assessment **[ENV11]** for the Local Plan Review identifies that Tiverton exhibits the best travel habits in Mid Devon with fewer than 60% of journeys by car and over 20% on foot or by bicycle. It is therefore important that future development enhances and facilitates modal shift and does not have a pernicious influence. This criterion also reflects proposed improvements to the interchange of sustainable travel modes and bus station. Take up of public transport is generally low in Tiverton (0% Train, 3% bus/minibus or coach¹) and therefore it is considered that this policy criterion is reasonable.
- 1.13 Criterion c) prioritises retaining Tiverton’s green setting, particularly to the west and south of the town and the historic parkland of Knightshayes to the north of the A361. The Grade I listed Knightshayes Court and associated Grade II* park and garden is one of Mid Devon’s greatest assets. The Setting of Knightshayes Park and Garden: A Historic Landscape Assessment (The Parks Agency; Sept 2007) **[ENV18]** identified that the historic interest and character of Knightshayes is closely bound up by views outward. If the character and appearance of Knightshayes is to be preserved, it is necessary that, as far as is reasonable, this setting be protected from intrusive development and that the effect of any development on that setting be a material consideration in the planning process. It is therefore important that the strategic policy context for Tiverton reflects this whilst ensuring that Tiverton can continue to develop in a balanced way.

¹ Appendix E https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/103558/transport_assessment_final_2014.pdf

- 1.14 Criterion d) aims to protect the importance of the Tidcombe Fen, other areas of biodiversity value and green infrastructure. The Tidcombe Fen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a wetland habitat and catchment area, both of which are very sensitive to hydrological change. The policy criteria ensures protection of the unique ecological and hydrological characteristics of the Fen and provides suitable flexibility for ‘opportunities for enhancement’.
- 1.15 Criterion e) aims to enhance the tourism and visitor role of the town and surrounding area. One of the key strands of the Mid Devon Tourism Study 2014 **[ECO05]** relates to ‘marketing the market towns and surrounding areas. This criterion sets the strategic context for Tiverton’s tourism and visitor offer in order to encourage investment in existing attractions, continued development of the market offer, events across the town and promotion of Tiverton as a key outlet for selling locally-sourced food and craft products.
- 1.16 Finally, Criterion f) supports measures to reduce flood risk within Tiverton, working with natural processes wherever possible in recognition of the fact that Tiverton has the highest number of properties at risk from fluvial flooding and the River Lowman has flooded parts of Tiverton on a number of occasions **[ENV08]**.
- 1.17 In conclusion, the approach to Tiverton as set out in Policy S10 is part of a strategy for the future planning of Mid Devon that is positively prepared in that it stipulates the strategic context for meeting objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements. It is justified when considered against reasonable alternatives, effective and deliverable over the plan period and consistent with national policy.