

Equalities Impact Assessment

Screening Report

1. What is an Equalities Impact Assessment?

1.1. The requirement to undertake formal Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) of plans was introduced in the Equality Act 2010. The Act has replaced previous anti-discrimination legislation and added new forms of discrimination. Authorities are required to have regard to the provisions of the Equality Act, namely the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires public authorities to have due regard for equalities considerations when exercising their functions. There are three aims of the general equality duty:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity (remove or minimise disadvantage, meet people's needs, take account of disabilities, encourage participation in public life); and
- Foster good community relations between people (tackle prejudice and promote understanding).

1.2. There are nine 'protected characteristics' as defined by The Equality Act 2010. The Act seeks to protect people from discrimination on the basis of these characteristics. They are:

- Age (including children and young people);
- Disability (including physical disability, mental health);
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief (including lack of belief);
- Sex; and
- Sexual orientation.

1.3. 'Gender reassignment', 'Marriage and civil partnership' and 'Sexual orientation' are not as directly related to planning policy as the other protected characteristics. As there are less clear links to planning policy, these three protected characteristics will not be assessed in the Issues Paper stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan (Regulation 18).

1.4. 'Due regard' is demonstrated through undertaking an equality assessment. The purpose of the equality assessment is:

- To understand the actual or potential effect of your functions, policies or decisions on different people;
- To consider if there are any unintended consequences for some groups;
- To consider if the policy will be fully effective for all target groups;
- To help you identify practical steps to tackle any negative effects or discrimination;
- To advance equality and to foster good relations; and
- To document the results.

1.5. The Equalities Impact Assessment encourages the council to look at its decision-making and what impact it has on different people. This can help the council to identify practical steps to tackle any negative impacts or discrimination, and to advance equality to ensure that their policy making is more effective.

2. The purpose of the report

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to assess the content of the Issues Paper consultation document (Regulation 18) to determine whether the authority producing it has complied with their duty under the Equality Act 2010 or whether further information and/or actions are required.

3. The document being assessed

- 3.1. Plan Mid Devon Issues Paper consultation document (November 2021) is being assessed prior to its publication for public consultation. The preparation of the document has been guided by national planning policy and legislation, and national planning practice guidance.
- 3.2. The Issues Paper consultation document (November 2021), identifies issues that are relevant to the preparation of a new Local Plan for Mid Devon and the future planning of the district. These issues include housing need and affordability, Gypsy and Traveller sites, employment and rural prosperity, town centres, infrastructure, environmental protection and climate emergency, historic and natural environment, design of development, and current proposals for large scale leisure and retail development at Junction 27, and for the Culm Garden Village.

4. The key people or organisations involved in the preparation of the Issues document

- 4.1. The Issues Paper consultation document has been prepared by the Forward Planning Team within the Planning, Economy and Regeneration Service of the Mid Devon District Council. The document is subject to approval by the Council's Cabinet.

5. What is the main aim or purpose of the current or proposed new policy and what are the intended outcomes?

- 5.1. There is a legal requirement for Mid Devon District Council to complete a review of the Local Plan every five years starting from the date of the adoption of the Local Plan. The current Mid Devon Local Plan was adopted on 29th July 2020 and the Council has agreed to commence the review of the Local Plan now. The new Local Plan has been given the working title 'Plan Mid Devon' and a timeframe of 2023-2043. The first step towards the new Local Plan is to produce an Issues consultation document for consultation purposes. The Issues consultation document outlines the topics that will need to be addressed through policies and proposals in the new Local Plan, which affects those who live and work in the Mid Devon area. These topics include:

- Responding to the climate emergency and moving to a zero carbon future;
- Delivering growth, infrastructure and regeneration to meet our needs ;
- Housing affordability and choice;
- Maintaining and enhancing the natural and built environment, and respecting environmental limits;
- Improving our health and well-being;
- Supporting rural vitality and a prosperous rural economy.

- 5.2. The Issues consultation document will be consulted on in early 2022. The document seeks views on the scope and content of the Local Plan (in accordance with regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012).

6. Are there gaps in evidence which make it difficult or impossible to form an opinion on how the existing or proposed policy, strategy, procedure, project or service does or might affect different groups of people?

6.1. The Issues consultation document is intended to gather initial opinions on what the Plan Mid Devon 2023-2043 should address. At this stage, no firm proposals are being consulted upon and so different groups of people will not be disadvantaged provided they are able to respond to the consultation. A number of measures are being considered to ensure an inclusive approach to community involvement ensuring as far as possible all sections of the community can be involved. The Council will gather new evidence to help inform the preparation of the new Local Plan as it is being progressed.

7. Conclusion

7.1. A full Equalities Impact Assessment is not required at this Regulation 18 Issues stage in plan making and the Public Sector Equalities Duty is met as at this early stage no firm proposals are being consulted upon. The elements of the consultation are not likely to result in negative equality impacts that would require justification nor mitigation, as no policy or development is proposed or potential locations identified.

7.2. The conclusion of this report is that the Issues Paper is unlikely to have a significant negative effect under the Equality legislation and thus there is no need for it to be subject to a full Equalities Impact Assessment. As Plan Mid Devon evolves it may be necessary to undertake further screenings of the Plan Mid Devon and potentially, supporting documents, which may conclude that a full Equalities Impact Assessment and/or action is required to ensure that the Public Sector Equality Duty is met.

7.3. However, as the Council is at the beginning of the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Equalities Impact Assessment will be updated in the subsequent stages of the Local Plan and its emerging policies and proposals (including the Draft Policies and Site Options report, Regulation 19 Publication (Proposed Submission consultation) and the adopted Plan).

7.4. This report will be made available and published together with the Plan Mid Devon Issues Paper.