

## OUR TOWNS AND THEIR ENVIRONS

12.1 Most planning activity takes place around the district's three main towns at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton and their immediate environs. This is since they have the largest communities and are where the greatest need exists for new homes, jobs, services and other facilities to be provided. Additionally, for sustainability reasons, they are where the substantial proportion of new development is planned through Local Plans, including through redevelopment and extensions to the urban extensions and provision of new transport and other infrastructure.

### Town centre vitality and viability

12.2 Mid Devon's three main towns – Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton each have key roles in providing a range of shops, employment and services for their communities and their environs. However, their town centres face a challenging future due to changing national retailer requirements, online shopping and reduced consumer spending. This has become more pronounced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and with greater reliance on shopping over the internet and home deliveries.



View over River Exe, Tiverton

12.3 It is recognised that the town centre is at the heart of a market town's community. For this reason the adopted Local Plan identifies 'primary shopping areas' in the three main town centres, where the shopping function will be safeguarded and enhanced. Within these 'primary shopping areas' are areas of 'primary shopping frontage' where retail development is concentrated, including a high proportion of uses such as food, drinks, clothing and household goods. The Local Plan has a requirement that at ground floor level the proportion of A1 (retail), A2 (financial and professional) and A3 (café and restaurant) will not be permitted to fall below 85% of all units. Generally, planning permission would not be needed when the existing and the proposed use fall within these three use classes.

12.4 In September 2020 the Government simplified the use classes order to help achieve its policy objective to rejuvenate and safeguard the vitality and viability of town centres. This included replacing use Classes A1, A2, A3 and Class B1 (Business) into a new 'Class E' (Commercial, Business and Service), which has enabled a wider range of use changes within this new class. The Government has subsequently brought into force from 1st April 2021, and which took effect from 1st August 2021 a permitted development right for change of use from Class E to residential use, which is intended to help bring forward new homes through the conversion of existing buildings. This only applies to properties under 1,500 square metres of floorspace, and to properties that have been in Class E use for 2 years and have been vacant for 3 months ahead of a prior approval application date to the Council. Prior approval is where confirmation is sought from the Council that specified parts of a development are acceptable, before work can commence, and this allows the Council to consider the proposals and their likely impacts in regard to certain factors (e.g. noise, odour, waste handling, opening hours, air quality, design and appearance, transport impact, risk from flooding) and how these may be mitigated. While the change has the potential to enable more people to live in the three main town centres in Mid Devon, increase footfall and help support the evening economy, it also has potential to result in the loss of shops and other commercial uses, breaking up areas of primary shopping frontage and eroding the character and appearance of their primary shopping areas. However, it is not known what the scale of impact might be and whether the benefit of more residential use in town centres might outweigh any losses of commercial uses and would not fundamentally harm the vitality and viability of the town centres. For example, a small number of retail to residential conversions may have little impact on the total available retail floorspace, and not be sufficient to justify intervention by the Council.

12.5 There is an opportunity for the Council to introduce 'Article 4 Directions' at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton town centres to restrict Class E to residential permitted development rights. However, the potential harm that the direction is intended to address will need to be clearly identified and the move for a direction would be scrutinised by the Government. The Government has set out measures which will be included in a revised National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that Article 4 directions are used in a targeted way to protect the thriving core of historic high street areas. The use of Article 4 directions to remove national permitted development rights should: where they relate to change from non-residential use to residential use, be limited to situations where an Article 4 direction is necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts (this could include the loss of the essential core of a primary shopping area which would seriously undermine its vitality and viability, but would be very unlikely to extend to the whole of a town centre); in other cases, be limited to situations where an Article 4 direction is necessary to protect local amenity or the well-being of the area (this could include the use of Article 4 directions to require planning permission for the demolition of local facilities); in all cases, be based on robust evidence, and apply to the smallest geographical area possible.



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12.6 It is evident in a national context that shopping habits are changing and more people are choosing to shop online and have home deliveries. The current pandemic has helped to accentuate this trend. The preparation of a new Local Plan provides an opportunity to look at the role of town centres in Mid Devon afresh and reconsider the role of their core areas, with potential for a greater emphasis placed on supporting a visitor experience through leisure, entertainment and cultural activities, cafes, restaurants and bars, which can maintain and improve footfall and the time people spend in a high quality historic environment.

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12.7 The new Local Plan will provide an opportunity to review the policy approach to our three main town centres. This could include:

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- continuing to identify 'primary shopping areas' and the 'primary shopping frontages', with a percentage threshold for town centre uses, and with potential for using 'Article 4 directions to remove national permitted development rights to change to residential use, or,
- No longer defining 'primary shopping frontages' and allowing a wider variety of uses in the town centres to support their wider leisure, cultural and entertainment roles.

## Question 34

**How should we prioritise the planning of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton town centres? Please go through questions 34A to D, and provide your reasons why.**

- Maintain a high proportion of shops and other commercial uses and services?**
- Support a wider visitor experience by giving flexibility for a variety of other uses, including leisure, cultural and entertainment facilities?**
- Allow the conversion of more commercial properties to residential use?**
- Other, please tell us what**

12.8 The Council will continue to engage with Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton Town Councils about the future of their town centres and will also encourage and look for opportunities for public and private partnerships to attract new investment.



## Sustainable neighbourhoods

12.9 Mid Devon has many types of neighbourhoods, ranging from towns, villages and rural hamlets. Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton make up our three main towns while there are 22 designated villages and multiple rural communities spread across the District. Mid Devon has a very low population density of 0.9 people per hectare<sup>24</sup> and of the challenges Mid Devon faces is ensuring that we have sustainable neighbourhoods, with everyday needs within easy reach for our communities for the wide range of neighbourhoods in our district. In planning for our communities, as well as embracing the special qualities of the different areas in our District there is a familiar concept that could help benefit all local areas, that is the 20-minute neighbourhood. 20 minute neighbourhoods can be supported through the planning of new facilities and also retaining those facilities which are already present but which could be at risk of closure.

12.10 The idea of the '20-minute neighbourhood' has been around for many years, but has more recently grown interest around the world, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the importance of liveability of where you live. With people spending more time locally, working from home more frequently, using public green space, cycling and walking instead of using cars and connecting with neighbours. The basic idea is that people should be able to access their daily needs within a short distance from their homes. 20-minute neighbourhoods have multiple benefits, greater social and economic inclusion, including boosting our local economies, improving people's health and well-being, increasing social connections in communities and tackling climate change.

12.11 The concept is most commonly applied in urban areas however it is a useful tool for rural areas also. For our towns and larger villages it means creating complete, compact and connected neighbourhoods where people can meet their everyday needs within a short walk or cycle. For smaller villages it is making it easy for people so that they only need to get to one place for most of their needs. For more rural areas it's enabling those connections, making everyday resources within easy reach, by linking groups of villages and exploring opportunities for good walking and cycling networks.

12.12 Every community will have its own context and aspirations for the future. Any plans to create a 20-minute neighbourhood should be based on what the local community wants, however the following characteristics are likely to be part of the mix.



TCPA 20-Minute Neighbourhoods (2021)



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12.13 This shouldn't mean discrete zones for living and working but rather a mosaic of neighbourhoods which interlink. Here at Mid Devon we are already embracing the idea of the 20-minute neighbourhood with a goal of making our District a great and inclusive place to live. The principles of a 20-minute neighbourhood largely formed part of the announcement from Government in 2017 for plans for a number of new Garden Villages and Towns across the County, including the proposed Culm Garden Village in Mid Devon. We have also started our own local research on what people think of their neighbourhood in new build homes. A resident's survey of recently completed new homes was undertaken in early 2021. The survey findings indicate that overall residents have a moderate level of satisfaction of their neighbourhood with residents most happy with their schools, safety, character and appearance and noise levels. However, what we can improve on are pedestrian and cycle routes both in quality and quantity to important services and facilities<sup>25</sup>.

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12.14 A number of partners nationally, including the Town and Country Planning Association, Sport England, Sustrans, the Design Council and Fields in Trust are working together to support the goal of achieving 20-minute neighbourhoods. To achieve 20-minute neighbourhoods in Mid Devon we will need the support of our communities and we will work together with a number of partners including Devon County Council who are our education and highways authority, the NHS, Healthcare Trusts, local businesses and many other key partners.

12.15 To help us achieve this goal we would like you to help us identify what is important to you in your neighbourhood and what we can improve.

### Question 35

Which town (or village or rural area) do you live in?

### Question 36

What do you like most about where you live?

### Question 37

How do you think we could achieve a 20 minute neighbourhood where you live to make it more sustainable?



Local business in CREDITON



## Neighbourhood Planning

12.16 The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new approach to planning which has aimed to give people more say about what goes on in their local area. Town and parish councils in Mid Devon are able to prepare Neighbourhood Plans, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders. Neighbourhood Planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. Local communities can choose to set planning policies through a neighbourhood plan and/or grant permission through development orders. At the time of writing Mid Devon currently has one made Neighbourhood Plan and three Designated Neighbourhood Plan Areas. Once a Neighbourhood Plan has been examined and has passed its referendum it forms part of the statutory development plan for the area it covers, alongside the Mid Devon Local Plan and the Devon Waste and Minerals Plans, and carries full weight for guiding planning applications submitted to the Council for determination and the decisions made on these.

12.17 Where Town and Parish Councils are preparing neighbourhood plans the Council will work positively to help ensure that these are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the current Local Plan for Mid Devon. While a draft neighbourhood plan is not tested against the policies in an emerging Local Plan it should have regard to up to date evidence, such as local housing need, that will inform the local plan process. The Council will ensure that Town and Parish councils are fully engaged throughout the preparation of Plan Mid Devon and will discuss and aim to agree the relationship between policies in an emerging neighbourhood plan and those in the emerging local plan with regard to national planning policy and guidance.

## Issues and opportunities to plan for

### Tiverton and its environs

12.18 Tiverton is a medium sized market town serving a rural hinterland in the central part of Mid Devon and to the north. The strategy of the current Local Plan is to maintain its status as largest urban area in Mid Devon and 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.

12.19 While the majority of current planned growth at Tiverton (1580 dwellings and 30,000 sq m of commercial floorspace) is through an eastern extension to the town, the long-term options for further growth are constrained by the town's topography, flood plains and the position of the A361. Cumulative traffic impacts on Junction 27 of the M5 must also be considered. Improvements to signalisation of the junction will have provided capacity for planned strategic development in Tiverton. However, additional development may require further improvements to the junction. Traffic assessments will be required where appropriate to consider impacts on the local and strategic road network.



12.20 The current local plan allocates land for development on a number of smaller sites at the town, including Farleigh Meadows (255 dwellings), Town Hall (59 dwellings), Moorhayes Park (8 dwellings), Howden Court (10 dwellings), Roundhill (20 dwellings), Palmerston Park (25 dwellings), Phoenix Lane (60 dwellings), and Blundell's School (200 dwellings). Land at Tidcombe Hall is identified as a contingency site (100 dwellings).

12.21 Other constraints to future expansion of Tiverton include the need to protect the Tidcombe Fen Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and the setting of the Grand Western Canal Conservation Area and Knightshayes Court Grade 1 Listed Building.

12.22 The Council is preparing a masterplan for Tiverton Town Centre. This is a key regeneration project that aims to enhance the economic prospects of the town and provide a clear strategy to make sure Tiverton builds on its existing qualities and assets to meet its full potential as a thriving market town. The masterplan will be a Supplementary Planning Document and a material consideration for decisions made on planning applications submitted to the Council for determination.

12.23 Tiverton Town Council is currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for its parish. The Neighbourhood Plan is in Pre-Submission (Regulation 14) stage. This includes policies on type, scale, design and character of new development. The policies also include provision for local green spaces, delivering biodiversity net gain, and protecting built heritage. The Neighbourhood Plan raises the issue of a sustainable and carbon neutral community, shortage of affordable homes, temporary accommodation and lack of pedestrian and cycle connectivity within and outside of the town. The Plan points out the need to revitalise Tiverton's historic town centre and the risk of losing footfall due to out-of-town retail, shopping centres and the internet, the need for lower cost rental housing, and the lack of starter units and office space.

12.24 The preparation of this Issues Paper has helped to identify some key local facilities and a range of issues affecting the Tiverton area, which we have listed below. We will take these into consideration and investigate further to help us prepare Plan Mid Devon. The following questions provide an opportunity for you to tell us more about these or other issues which you think are important to the future planning of Tiverton and its environs.

- A396 – heavy traffic and the narrow and historic Bickleigh Bridge
- Potential for a cycle route in the Exe Valley
- Provision of healthcare facilities locally, including the Tiverton and District Hospital
- Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life
- Opportunities to regenerate the Pannier Market and land at Phoenix Lane
- Visitor potential – enhanced provision of accommodation with the recently completed Premier Inn





## Question 38

**What do you think are the top 5 main issues affecting Tiverton and its environs that need to be addressed in a new Local Plan? Please rank these in order of importance (1 = most important, 5 = least important)**

## Question 39

**What do you think are the opportunities for us to consider in the future planning of Tiverton and its environs, including locations that may be suitable for development?**

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### Cullompton and its environs

12.25 The current Local Plan includes proposals for Cullompton to become the strategic focus of new development in Mid Devon. This reflects the town's accessibility, economic potential and environmental capacity. This strategy will improve access to housing through urban extensions and expanded employment opportunities. There will be significant improvements to the town's infrastructure and connectivity, including the reopening of the railway station, and improved services for its population and nearby rural areas.

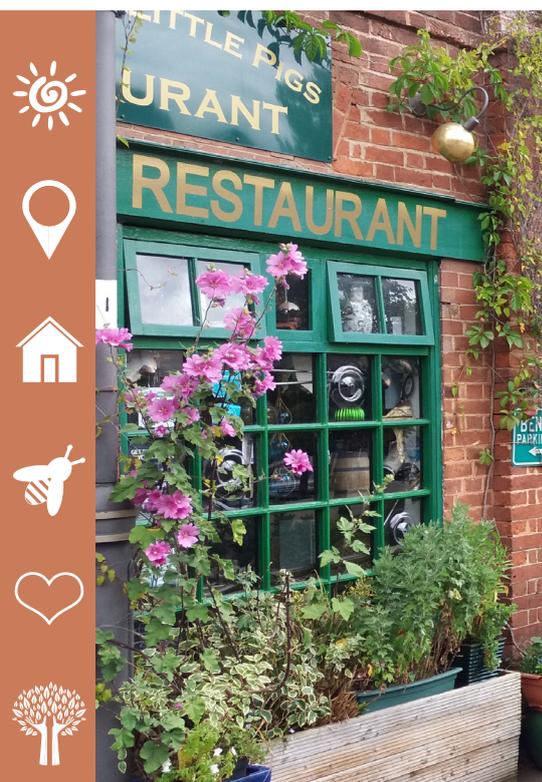
12.26 The Council is currently preparing a masterplan for Cullompton Town Centre. Once adopted this will form the basis for the regeneration of the town; enhancing the town's economic prospects and providing a clear strategy to ensure the town meets its full potential as an attractive, thriving and sustainable town post COVID-19 and into the future. This is alongside work to help regenerate Cullompton Town Centre through the High Streets Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) programme.

12.27 Cullompton Town Council has become the first in Mid Devon to have an approved Neighbourhood Plan, passing its referendum held on 6th May 2021. The Neighbourhood Plan now forms part of the statutory development plan for Cullompton parish, alongside the Mid Devon Local Plan and the Devon Waste and Minerals Plans, and carries full weight for guiding planning applications submitted to the Council for determination and the decisions made on these. It has policies on traffic and the public transport network, cycling and walking paths, flood attenuation, housing and gypsy and traveller sites. The policies also call for protection of the natural and historic environment, recreational facilities, economy and green space amongst others. The Plan points out flooding issues, lack of public rights of way, traffic congestion due to the proximity to the M5 and shortages of sports pitches.



12.28 The preparation of this Issues Paper has helped to identify some key local facilities and a range of issues affecting the Cullompton area, which we have listed below. We will take these into consideration and investigate further to help us prepare Plan Mid Devon. The following questions provide an opportunity for you to tell us more about these or other issues which you think are important to the future planning of Cullompton and its environs.

- The volume of traffic on the A373 to Honiton and the need for improvements to this road
- Traffic through the town centre when the M5 is closed and the unsuitable nature of the B3181 and A396 for diverted traffic
- Junction 28 – impact of M5 closures
- Monthly farmers market
- Disconnectivity between the western and eastern parts of Cullompton due to the town being bisected by the M5
- Lack of hotels, yet there are local visitor attractions, including the Blackdown Hills AONB and the Cullompton Leat
- There is need for connectivity between Cullompton and the proposed Culm Garden Village
- More cycling routes are needed
- Utilise available brownfield site opportunities
- Need for town centre improvements and parking
- Need for air quality improvements in the town centre
- Lack of space in the town centre for waste and recycling storage
- Opportunity for designing in underground waste collection facilities at the proposed Culm Garden Village to provide increased capacity and efficiency
- Opportunity for a new railway station





## Question 40

**What do you think are the top 5 main issues affecting Cullompton and its environs that need to be addressed in a new Local Plan? Please rank these in order of importance (1 = most important, 5 = least important)**

## Question 41

**What do you think are the opportunities for us to consider in the future planning of Cullompton and its environs, including locations that may be suitable for development?**

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### Crediton and its environs

12.29 The current Local Plan includes proposals for Crediton to continue to develop in its role as a small and vibrant market town, serving a rural hinterland in the western part of the district. This strategy aims to improve access to housing within the town, expand employment opportunities and improve the quantity and quality of the existing retail provision.

12.30 The established settlement limit for Crediton is now at the extent of the parish boundary, with the exception of land to the south of the town. The future planning of Crediton will therefore need to include consideration of neighbouring parishes (Crediton Hamlets, Sandford, and Shoebrook, and also Newton St Cyres). This is since the town provides a range of local shops and services supporting this hinterland, and the town and its environs are connected by the A377 road (from Exeter to Barnstaple) and have strong ties of economic activity (including food production and food processing). The new Local Plan will provide an opportunity to look at the future planning of the Crediton area afresh, including the capacity of existing roads, opportunities for cycling and walking, improved rail services, and at a more strategic level investigating the feasibility of linking the A377 with the A30.

12.31 The Council has committed to prepare a masterplan for Crediton Town Centre. Once adopted, this will have Supplementary Planning Document status, with the aim to provide a clear strategy to ensure that Crediton town centre meets its full potential as an attractive, thriving vibrant place with a strong economic function, now and into the future.



12.32 Crediton Town Council is currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for its parish. The Neighbourhood Plan is in Pre-Submission (Regulation 14) stage. This includes policies on sustainable development, natural and historic environment, design, housing and site allocations. The policies also call for community facilities, town centre and economic development, and implementation of renewable energy. The Plan also points out issues such as poor mobile phone signal, lack of train station, removal of existing trees by development and losing open green fields and hedgerows to development.

12.33 The preparation of this Issues Paper has helped to identify some key local facilities and a range of issues affecting the Crediton area, which we have listed below. We will take these into consideration and investigate further to help us prepare Plan Mid Devon. The following questions provide an opportunity for you to tell us more about these or other issues which you think are important to the future planning of Crediton and its environs.

- Crediton town is developed to the limits of parish boundary
- There is a need for a cyclepath at Sandford
- Existing railway station
- Crediton has a strong local food scene
- Farmers market / dairy / products sold all over the country
- Milling / printing
- Crediton Hospital
- NHS hub
- Tourism and St Boniface Patron Saint of Devon – Church
- Need parking for touring coaches
- Poor air quality in the town centre
- Need sites for new businesses and to expand
- Queen Elizabeth School
- Rivers Creedy and Yeo – poor water quality in river Yeo



View into Crediton



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## Question 42

What do you think are the top 5 main issues affecting Crediton and its environs that need to be addressed in a new Local Plan? Please rank these in order of importance (1 = most important, 5 = least important)

## Question 43

What do you think are the opportunities for us to consider in the future planning of Crediton and its environs, including locations that may be suitable for development?

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