

# Supporting rural vitality and a prosperous rural economy

## Local shops and services

The provision of local shops, community facilities and other services plays a vital role in maintaining rural prosperity. Larger villages often have local services, whereas smaller villages and more rural areas rely on access to larger settlements or work in conjunction with each other as a cluster. However, changing shopping and cultural habits, and lack of opportunities for the growth of village communities, can impact on the viability and vitality of villages.

Policy DM23 in the current Local Plan helps prevent the loss of community facilities such as shops, cultural and recreational facilities and other important local services. Plan Mid Devon provides an opportunity to retain this policy and could also identify land within, or adjoining, villages that would be suitable for new community facilities.



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## Small scale housing potential at villages to help sustainability

The sustainability of rural areas can be supported by identifying opportunities for villages to grow and thrive. It can include some small scale housing provision, through allocations, or on rural exceptions sites, and through schemes led by Community Land Trusts. This can help meet local housing need and can also support local shops and services, and could facilitate other improvements such as the introduction of public charging points for electric vehicles, and investment in footpaths and cycle routes.

The current Local Plan designates 22 rural settlements across Mid Devon as ‘villages suitable for limited development’, based on these having a school, local shop and public transport. Plan Mid Devon provides an opportunity to reconsider the level of services needed for a rural settlement to be suitable for development to meet local needs, as new technologies through improved broadband connections have meant that many people are now able to work from home and also make use of home deliveries for shopping.

## Rural economy

Farming is an important industry and a significant contributor to Mid Devon’s economy. Approximately 8% of the Mid Devon workforce is directly involved in agriculture, and 18.5% of Mid Devon businesses are dependent on agriculture either as primary producers, processors, manufacturers or retailers. Although farming largely remains outside of the land use planning system, planning can support farming through policies allowing the diversification of farms to include commercial uses, such as tourist accommodation and visitor attractions.

The current Local Plan includes policies to support rural employment development in the countryside, provided that this is of an appropriate use and scale for its location, and would not lead to an unacceptable impact on the local road network and to the character and appearance of the countryside.

Plan Mid Devon provides an opportunity to look at what types of employment development might be acceptable in a rural location, whilst seeking to avoid industrialisation of the countryside. There will be a continual need to balance commercial activity in our rural areas with the protection of the open countryside and high quality landscapes.



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