

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 3 October 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.03 am and ended at 1.10 pm. The meeting was adjourned at 11.00 am and reconvened at 11.15 am.

25 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 5 September 2023 were confirmed as a true record.

26 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interests.

27 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

28 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

29 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

30 Housing Monitoring Update to year ending 31 March 2023

The Committee considered the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management's report outlining the latest monitoring figures on housing completions, forecasts and projections of the district's five-year housing land supply to year ending 31 March 2023.

Members noted that in summary from April 2022 to March 2023 there were 998 net new dwellings completed after taking into account 67 care home bedrooms compared to 1,039 completed from April 2021 to March 2022.

The main reasons that the council could only demonstrate a forecast of 4.28 years of deliverable supply were due to:

- a) The Planning Inspectorate taking a stricter approach on clear deliverability on planning appeals;
- b) The slow-down in build rates and sales due to the current challenging housing market conditions;
- c) Loss of developers/builders due to administration.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that because of the significant shortfall in housing land supply. Members should be mindful of the implications for decision making as set out in paragraph 3.9 in the report.

Comments made by Non-Committee Members included:

- There is a need to look at how we calculate windfall sites. It was advised that the larger development sites were not taken into account.
- Clarification was sought about the high phosphate levels in the River Axe and if the levels were sorted and development could commence in the catchment area would this help achieve the five-year housing land supply. In response it was advised that there were only about 150 homes held up at the application stage purely because of by the phosphate level issue. A much larger numbers of applications had other issues to resolve which were on top of the phosphate levels. This is impacting on the housing land supply position but would not in itself make up the shortfall.
- Clarification was sought on the number of affordable homes completed and whether the council was delivering the required 25%. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that a lot of the smaller sites fell below the required threshold to provide affordable housing and that a number of the larger sites were subject to viability issues which resulted in developers delivering less than the required proportion.
- It was suggested that the housing delivery test was flawed following a government report in March 2023 which appeared to penalise councils.

Comments made by Committee Members included:

- Clarification was sought about lapsed consented planning applications and whether landowners were reminded about these as these would help bolster the five-year land supply. There was not a process in place to send out reminders. Although it was acknowledged it was a contributing factor, it was not a major factor, and that more research was required to understand this further.
- Clarification was sought on the AONBs and the lack of a five-year housing land supply and how this would affect AONB areas if the town or parish council did not have a neighbourhood plan. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management referred to the tilted balance in the government guidance and did not expect additional development to take place in AONBs as a result of the housing land supply position and that policies in the local plan would be relied on if there was not a neighbourhood plan.
- Clarification was sought on whether the pause on the assessment of housing sites in the draft local plan had affected the current position. There was no immediate impact but progressing the local plan in a timely manner would help bolster the housing numbers in the long term.
- Clarification was sought on paragraph 3.9. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management referred to paragraph 11 in the NPPF which outlined what is a sustainable development and reassured Members it was not an open door for developers.
- Reference was made to Section 5 in the appended report and the inequality of the supply of houses in the West End of East Devon and the rest of East Devon.
- Reference was made to the housing monitoring figures for the last 4 years for windfall completions and whether there was a plan to review the way these numbers were calculated as it appeared the council was systematically underestimating the number of windfall sites coming forward. The Assistant

Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management took this point on board and said he was happy to look into this further.

Two further recommendations were proposed by Councillor Mike Howe and Councillor Jess Bailey which were supported by the proposer of the recommendations, Councillor Ben Ingham and seconder, Councillor Charlotte Fitzgerald.

1. that this report and its decision be reported to the East Devon District Council Planning Committee.
2. That a report in respect of the issues relating to windfall sites be brought to a future Strategic Planning Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the district five-year housing land supply position and the potential risks and implications of the forecast supply as detailed in Section 5 of the Housing Monitoring Update 2023 be noted.
2. That the residential dwellings completion date and future forecasts for the district be noted.
3. That the Housing Monitoring Update 2023 be published on the Council's website as part of the Authority Monitoring Report.
4. That the publication of the 2023 Housing Monitoring Update audit trail document and the detailed tables in Appendix 2 of the Housing Monitoring Update 2023 be delegated to the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management in consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Strategic Planning and the document be published by the end of October 2023 on the Council's website as part of the Authority Monitoring Report.
5. That this report and its decision be reported to the East Devon District Council Planning Committee
6. That a report in respect of the issues relating to windfall sites be brought to a future Strategic Planning Committee meeting.

31 **Methodology for the designation of Green Wedges in the new local plan**

The report presented to the Committee sought endorsement of the methodology for defining Green Wedges in the new local plan prior to the consultation at the Regulation 18 stage of the draft local plan. This was following previous discussions where Members had highlighted issues where, in principle, Green Wedges should be designated between nearby settlements to avoid the risk of coalescence or loss of identity.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management referred Members to paragraph 2.2.1 in Appendix 1 which identified the existing Green Wedges and highlighted that sites already identified as proposed development allocations in those areas would be excluded from the areas to be assessed. It was also highlighted that Green Wedges would also not be considered for the proposed new settlement as master planning would be required first.

The assessment methodology that was before Members outlined the various stages. It included the assessment criteria that would help to prevent the coalescence of settlements and to maintain a sense of place and identity for communities and proposed to assess potential Green Wedge locations against the criteria through strengths and evidence.

Many Members voiced their concerns on the content of the assessment methodology.

Discussion covered:

- Several Members suggested that Green Wedges should have been looked at before the development.
- Town and Parish Council views would need to be considered prior to the consultation stage.
- A concern was raised about the time frame and to avoid a public consultation over the Christmas period.
- It was not clear in paragraph 2.2.1 whether the sites identified as proposed development include both the first and second choice sites.
- It was questioned whether the criteria that defined the Green Wedges previously proposed was correct.
- There was no mention of assessing Green Wedges already mentioned in neighbourhood plans.
- A concern was raised about the evidence criteria that focussed heavily on the visual impact on landscapes when in reality the impact would need to focus on more than what can be seen.
- Clarification was sought on the receipt of a report on the new settlement.
- Concern was raised about whether there would be a Green Wedge between the new settlement and Farringdon.
- There was a need to update the interactive map to help visualise how things would change.
- Not happy with the proposed method as there was no indication of how to safeguard against encroachment.
- Disagreement with paragraph 2.2.1
- More work was needed, better plans, more detailed discussions and more Member involvement, not just officers.
- There was a need to protect all Grade 1 farmland.
- It was suggested that this would be looked at alongside wider needs for footpaths and cycleways linking settlements.

In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised the Committee that Green Wedges are about preventing settlement coalescence and should not be confused with other countryside protections and landscape designations which fulfil different functions. It was also explained that while there was a need to look at green infrastructure and how sustainable travel between settlements can be improved this should not be conflated into this work and needed to be done separately.

The Vice Chair urged Members to consider the recommendations, to try to look at them as a purpose and as an understanding in policy terms as to why Green Wedges should be there and what they should be doing. It should not just be there to stop development.

Councillor Marcus Hartnell pointed out that much of the debate had not touched on the methodology and that if other local authorities had used this methodology and had reached successful conclusions on their Green Wedge policies he didn't see a reason not to proceed with the methodology.

At the end of the debate the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised of the following key points that he recognised as concerns for Members.

These were:

1. A clear recognition in the methodology for officers to look at and assess areas identified in neighbourhood plans that have been allocated for purposes of preventing settlement coalescence.
2. Concern about paragraph 2.2.1 in the methodology and look at the conflict between allocations and Green Wedges with an action to report back to Strategic Planning Committee to flag up where there is a conflict between an allocation and a Green Wedge.

RESOLVED:

1. Amend the proposed methodology for defining Green Wedges, set out in appendix 1 of this report to include:
 - (a) consideration of all areas identified in neighbourhood plans that seek to prevent settlement coalescence.
 - (b) to identify conflicts between proposed allocations and Green Wedges for Members to consider further and,
 - (c) to ensure that all the areas identified for potential Green Wedges are considered under the methodology and that the methodology is used in the preparation of Green Wedge boundaries for consultation.
2. Agree that the proposed Green Wedges be brought to Committee in the first quarter of 2024 for Members consideration.

32 **Response to Government Consultation on plan-making reforms**

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management presented a report updating the Committee on the feedback provided by East Devon District Council on its concerns and considerations to the consultation that the Government were undertaking on proposed new style local plans.

Members noted the following key issues:

- The importance of having a vision in the local plan.
- To set out measurable outcomes for the plan period.
- The creation of National Development Management Policies.
- The ability to have genuine local policies.
- To explore digital technologies which can be used in templates.
- To have a 30-month plan timeframe.
- Supplementary plans would be more geographically defined.
- Community land auctions – opportunity to capture more value out of land.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed response to the consultation as set out in the report be endorsed and submitted as the Council's response to the consultation.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
J Bailey
B Collins
O Davey (Chair)
P Fernley
C Fitzgerald

M Hartnell
M Howe (Vice-Chair)
B Ingham
Y Levine
T Olive
H Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
G Jung
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management
Damian Hunter, Planning Solicitor
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

K Blakey
P Hayward
D Ledger

Chairman

Date: