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Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

New Community Options Appraisal

Report summary:

This report follows Members consideration of various iterations of a draft Local Plan which have proposed allocating land for a new community. Members also received a report on the 8th March documenting the work that had been done to date on this proposal and the timeline for bringing further work forward for Members consideration. This report seeks to summarise work undertaken by consultants (appended) to assess the 3 options for a new community identified.

It is clear from the assessments that of the 3 options identified option 2 scores markedly lower than the other two options and should in officers opinion be set aside as an option at this point. Options 1 and 3 however score very closely with option 1 slightly ahead. In line with the approach taken to site allocations elsewhere it is considered appropriate to consult on both of these options albeit making it clear that only one of them would actually be allocated.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That Members:

1. Agree to the principle of a new community forming a key element of a strategy for growth in the new Local Plan.
2. Views are sought on the vision statement for the new community included within this report.
3. Agree to consult on a proposed new community with option 1 identified as the preferred approach and option 3 as an alternative option for consultation. Option 2 would be identified in the consultation but as an option that has been discounted at this stage.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that Members fully consider the options around a new community forming part of the spatial strategy for the new Local Plan and are able to seek views from the community and other stakeholders based on the evidence provided.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response

- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- ☐ Economy and Assets
- ☐ Finance
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [1. SPC New Community Report.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\);](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ Better homes and communities for all
- ☒ A greener East Devon
- ☒ A resilient economy

Background

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 8th March 2022 Members considered a report detailing work to date on proposals for a further new community as part of the spatial strategy for the new Local Plan. The report detailed the background of these proposals back to a report to Strategic Planning Committee on the 4th September 2018 where the need for such a development was first formally identified. The report detailed work on the Garden Communities Programme and its inclusion within the programme as part of a wider bid under the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP). Funding had also been sought via Cabinet to investigate delivery vehicles to ensure that any new community could deliver to the Council's aspirations. This work had been commissioned and also included assessing geographical options for a new community based on call for sites submissions. This report seeks to report back on this phase of the work. If Members resolve to proceed with the new community then the commission would continue to include master planning of the preferred option and consideration of delivery vehicles.

The overall commission envisaged should it run its full course would cover the following key areas:

- 1) Review of options for the choice, form and location of new community proposals – a number of large scale proposals have been promoted through the initial call for sites process. The commission will help to ensure that there is a robust evidence base to inform the selection of development proposals in terms of the ability to secure key outcomes in line with the NPPF considerations.

The options review will need to consider key infrastructure such as:

- transport infrastructure both within and around the site including impacts on the major road network and the ability to promote active travel and a choice of modes of transport
- energy infrastructure and the ability to support zero carbon development
- green infrastructure including the ability to mitigate potential impact on key habitat sites and to provide biodiversity net gain

- community infrastructure, for example to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Connections to key services such as electricity, water, drainage and broadband as well as community and other infrastructure needed to support the development.

A full understanding of what infrastructure is needed and the associated costs will be required to assess the viability and deliverability of each option. The review will also need to consider the parties involved in each option and the governance arrangements and delivery vehicles they propose.

- 2) Vision– to work with Council officers and members to develop a 30 year vision for a new community in the district which sets out the Council's requirements in the form of a set of criteria against which the options and their proposed delivery vehicles can be assessed.
- 3) Initial Options Appraisal – to use the vision and criteria developed at stage 2 to assess the major development options and make an initial recommendation to be considered alongside a draft Local Plan for consultation.
- 4) Masterplan – Following consultation on the draft Local Plan and consideration of responses to each of the options if a proposed site for allocation is identified then the consultant team will then be expected to undertake a master planning exercise for this site in consultation with key consultees and through a process of community engagement.
- 5) Preferred delivery option/model – this will include all necessary stakeholder engagement to help define the preferred option for the delivery vehicle to bring forward the preferred new community option.
- 6) Business case – to include final modelling of infrastructure costs, indicative viability assessment and long term stewardship and legacy arrangements.

Key outputs from the work to include:

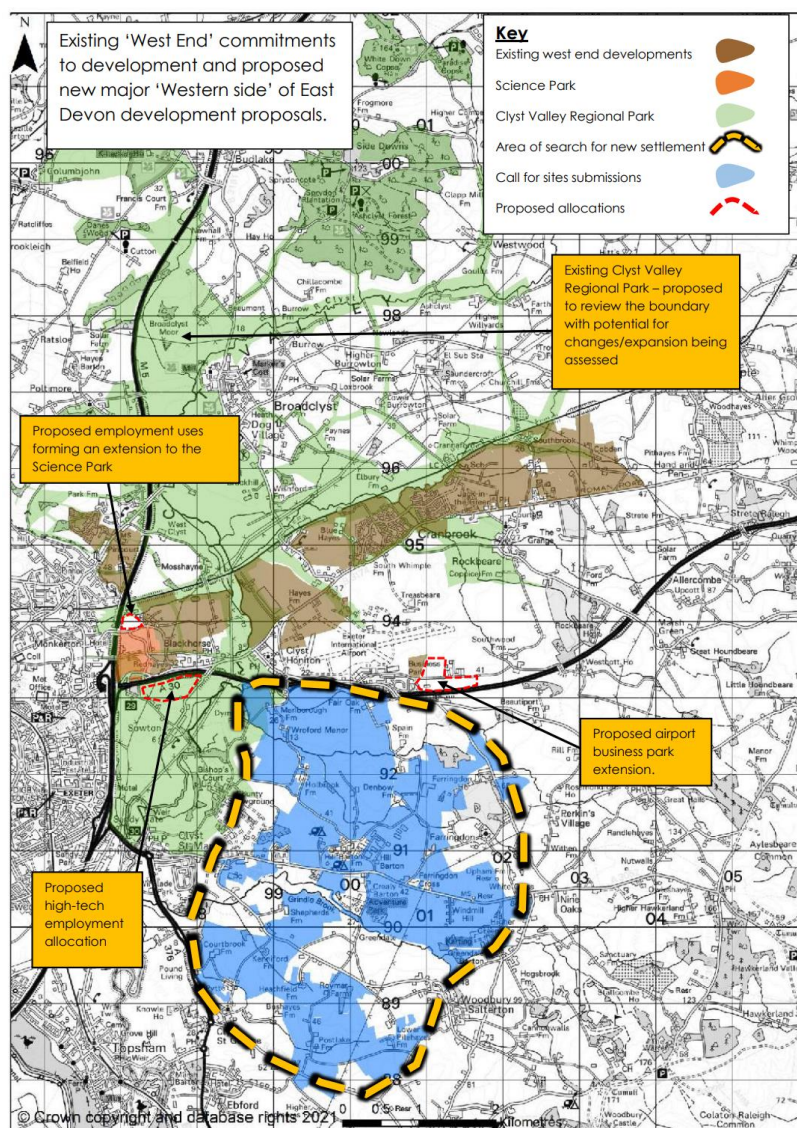
1. Transport Assessment – This will need to consider the impact of each of the proposed new community options on transport infrastructure taking into account other growth planned for within the area including as yet undelivered growth in the adopted Local Plan and Cranbrook Plan as well as that emerging through the production of the new Local Plan. Impacts on all forms of transport will need to be considered including impacts on the county and strategic road network which will need to be considered in consultation with the County Highway Authority and Highways England. The county council have an up to date traffic model of the area which will be made available. This can be used to test options for mitigating the impacts of growth on these networks. The capital and revenue costs of doing so will also need to be understood through this work alongside the alignment with the Exeter Transport Strategy 2020 – 2030.
2. Infrastructure Requirements Report – A detailed report covering all of the infrastructure requirements of the 3 new community options with a breakdown of the costs involved of connecting to key pieces of infrastructure. The report will need to identify where there are key benefits of one option over another as a result of its proximity to key infrastructure connections or where differences in capacity mean that one site is easier/ less costly to connect than another. The infrastructure requirements to be informed by the visioning work.
3. Vision Document – A document produced following workshop sessions with officers, members and partners detailing a high level vision for any new community within the west end of East Devon. The report to include key objectives for the community and a purpose and role for the settlement as well as setting out a criteria so that each of the options can be scored in terms of how well they would deliver against the vision.
4. Initial Options Report – An assessment of each of the 3 new community options against the agreed vision document and the criteria within it taking into account the gathered evidence on infrastructure costs, proposed delivery vehicles, transport implications etc such that a clear recommendation is made of which option will best deliver on the Council's aspirations. It is expected that this will be published as part of the evidence base in support of the consultation draft plan.

5. Masterplan – it is expected that this will provide a strategic level framework in the first instance that can be used as the basis for public consultation and engagement alongside the publication draft of the Local Plan. As such it provide a spatial interpretation of the vision and a foundation for future place making. It will enable further levels of detail, including design codes, to be commissioned in the future.
6. Business case – this will set out the rational for establishing a particular form of delivery vehicles to ensure that the vision for the new community is realised. It is expected that the five case model will be used to develop the business case. The business case will need to fulfil the requirements of section 3 of the 'Guidance on the New Towns Act 1981 (Local Authority Oversight) Regulations 2018' document.

This work has now advanced to stage 3 of the key areas set out above and an initial options report has now been provided and is appended to this report.

The 3 options

As part of their work the consultants have sought to refine the options that were originally identified by officers following the call for sites. These were set out originally in the working draft of the Local Plan as shown in blue within an area of search on the plan below:



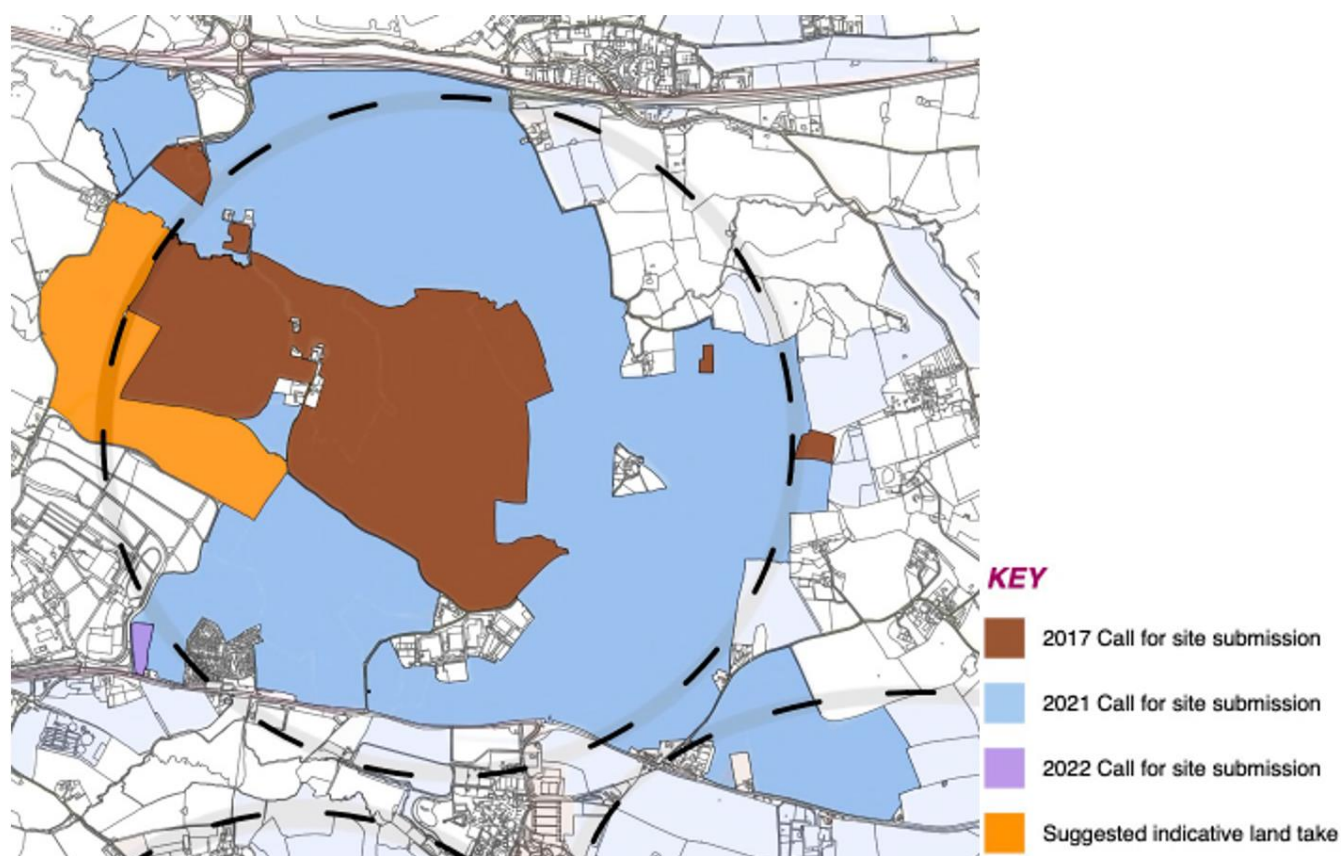
The consultants have sought to refine these areas to form 3 equivalent land areas based on the land requirements to establish a community of 8,000 homes. Members will recall that although we are only proposing to allocate 2,500 homes in this plan period it is intended to set out a vision for a

large settlement that would be built out into the following plan period post 2040. A lead in time of around 10 years is estimated before development would actually commence and build out rates are generally slow to start with due to initial opening up works, connections to infrastructure and ground works that have to come before homes can be built. As a result 2,500 homes by 2040 is considered to be realistic.

A settlement of around 8,000 homes would establish a town which could achieve good levels of self containment and deliver a good level of services and infrastructure to support its community and as a result this is seen as a desirable ultimate size for a new town.

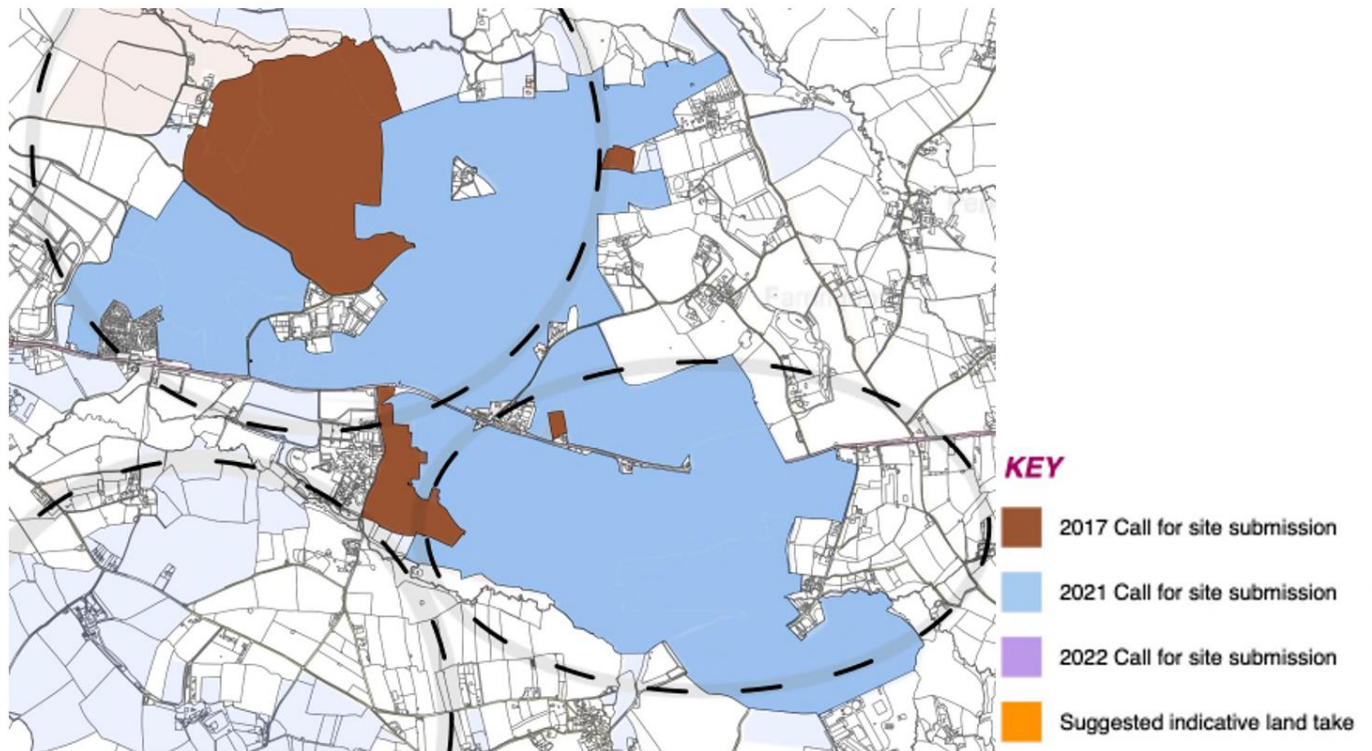
As a result of the consultants work the 3 options have been refined to the site areas shown below.

Option 1:



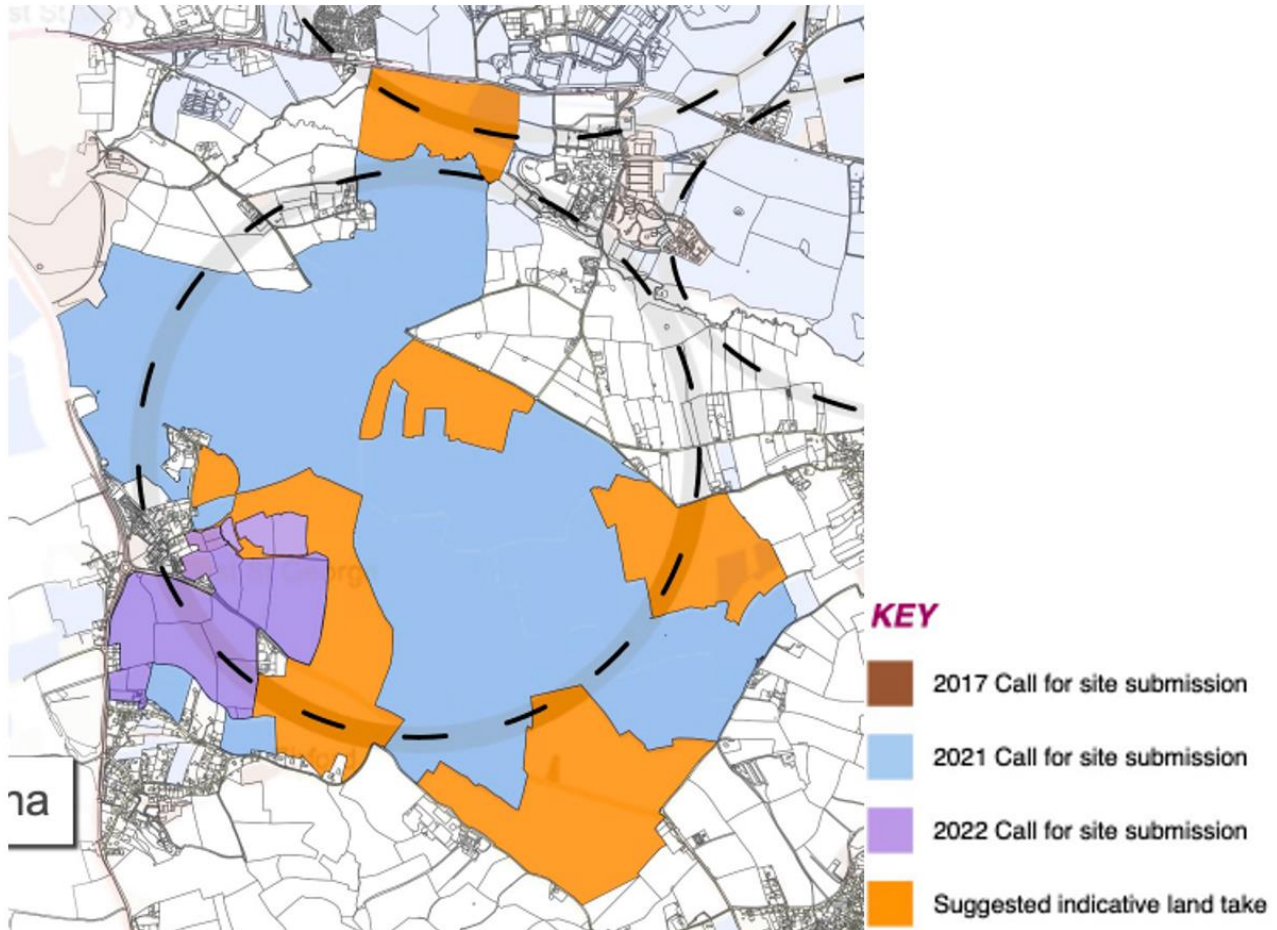
Source: Tibbalds (2022)

Option 2:



Source: Tibbalds (2022)

Option 3:



Source: Tibbalds (2022)

It should be noted that options 1 and 3 include some land that at this point has not been put forward through a call for sites exercise (shown in orange on the above plans) and so depending on which option is taken forward land owners would need to be approached. This is however appropriate and not unexpected given the scale of development envisaged albeit areas of land not put forward by land owners have been kept to a minimum.

The Options Appraisal

The attached options appraisal seeks to assess the 3 options against a series of criteria as per the table below:

Table 2.2 – Assessment Criteria

Landscape sensitivity
Ecological impact/Biodiversity
Sustainable transport
Environmental constraints (flooding, minerals, historic environment, pipelines/cabling etc)
Highways impact
Utility & Net Zero Carbon Infrastructure
Deliverability to include land ownership, presence of businesses/other land uses that need to be relocated and proximity of development to bad neighbours i.e. noise/traffic etc

Source: CBRE (2022)

The assessment has also been informed by a draft vision for the proposed new community which has been arrived at following workshops with Members held on the 26th July 2022 and 10th October 2022. The vision is as follows:

A second new settlement in East Devon with a self-sufficient, healthy and dynamic community with distinctive character. Delivering up to 8,000 high-quality homes with a range of tenures, places of work and a diverse mix of uses that are easily accessible via sustainable and active travel such that these become the dominant transport modes.

This new town will be more than just a settlement, it will be an ambitious and highly desirable place that supports the growth of a self-governing and self-sustaining community that establishes its culture at the outset in order to develop and thrive into the future.

The structure of the settlement will promote innovative design that will draw inspiration from the local context, including the unique surrounding historic environment, to create a rich character. Streets and spaces will be designed to encourage social interaction and will be embedded in a well-connected and integrated active travel network with comprehensive links to nearby employment, surrounding countryside and the city of Exeter.

It will be underpinned at its core by sustainability, wellbeing, and healthy living, creating an exemplar zero-carbon town both in terms of self-sufficiency and design and by doing so it will provide a legacy to the benefit of future generations.

This sustainable community will be sensitively and seamlessly integrated with the outstanding East Devon natural environment and contribute to the delivery of the Clyst Valley Regional Park whilst protecting nearby internationally recognised habitats.

It will provide a rich network of substantial open space and diverse landscaping, including areas of enhanced ecology and biodiversity, as well as opportunities for play, recreation and opportunities for food growing.

This vibrant and adaptable new settlement will preserve East Devon's legacy as an outstanding place to live. The use of local materials and labour will be promoted to deliver on local priorities, creating somewhere residents can be proud of and where people of all ages and lifestyles will prosper.

The assessment work as set out in the appended options appraisal concludes with the following scoring summary:

Assessment Category	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Landscape Sensitivity	2	2	3
Ecological Impact/Biodiversity*	3.4	3.6	3
Flood Risk	4	4	4
Minerals	3	1	5
Historic Environment	3	3	3
Sustainable Accessibility*	3.8	1.8	4.3
Highways*	4.8	4.1	4.6
Utilities*	3	2.3	2.3
Net Zero Carbon*	3.3	2.3	3
Climate Resilience*	2.7	3.4	2.7
Deliverability*	4.5	3	2.5
TOTAL	37.5	30.5	37.4

Source: CBRE (2022) Note: a higher score represents lower potential adverse impact/ higher benefit of each Option.

Key: *Where a number of assessments inform a technical category the average score per option is rounded to one decimal point and feeds through to the cumulative assessment in Section 12.

At this stage the scoring shows that option 2 is a less acceptable option than options 1 and 3 and so it is recommended that this option is not taken forward.

Options 1 and 3 are very closely scored in terms of the assessment at this point. While no weighting has been attached at this stage it is quite notable that option 1 scores significantly higher in terms of deliverability. This reflects a number of factors including the greater clarity over ownership and willingness of land owners to bring forward development and better opportunities to connect to the electricity network. It also reflects the opportunity to connect to the envisaged heat main interconnector between the proposed energy from waste plant at Hillbarton and the district

heat network serving Cranbrook and the enterprise zone sites. This would better enable a low carbon heat network and delivery of zero carbon development. Option 1 also has the least impact on the highway network which is known to be a significant concern for Members and the communities close to the option sites. These are significant factors in terms of meeting the vision for the new community and the overall strategy for the local plan.

Option 3 when considered at a comparable scale of development to option 1 raises concerns about potential proximity of development to the existing settlements of Clyst St Mary, Clyst St George and Woodbury. Although masterplanning could seek to ensure that green infrastructure is located to the edges of the option land area there is still a much greater risk of settlement coalescence with option 3, albeit overall it would have less landscape impact than option 1.

The scoring has not sought to weight any criteria above the others and this may be necessary as part of further work in order to inform Members consideration of which option is taken forward. At this stage the scoring shows option 1 only slightly ahead of option 3 in the scoring, however in officers opinion it is considered that the factors set out above distinguish option 1 as a preferred option at this stage and as such it is recommended that the two sites be consulted upon on the basis of option 1 presenting a preferred approach and option 3 as an alternative option.

Financial implications:

No direct financial implications on which to comment.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications arising other than as set out in the report.