

Report to: **Strategic Planning Committee**



Date of Meeting Tuesday 20 September 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Housing requirement and Site allocations – Axminster and surrounding areas

Report summary:

This report sets out recommendations for sites to be allocated for development through the new local plan for/at the settlements of – Axminster, Kilmington, Musbury, Hawkchurch and Chardstock. Subject to Committee approval, and any further assessment undertaken, the sites will be included as allocations for development in the Regulation 19 draft of the local plan that is proposed to be considered at Strategic Planning Committee in November 2024.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1) That Strategic Planning Committee agree to include the recommended site allocations set out in this report, for Axminster and surrounding areas, for inclusion in the Regulation 19 draft of the plan scheduled to be considered by this Committee in November 2024.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that appropriate land, in Axminster and surrounding areas, is allocated in the new local plan to provide for development needs, specifically for housing.

Officer: Ed Freeman – Assistant Director, Planning Strategy and Development Management,
efreeman@eastdevon.gov.uk, Tel 01395 517519

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: High Risk; To be found sound at Examination, and therefore to be in position where it can be adopted, the local plan will need to provide for sufficient and appropriate housing growth to meet levels set out by Government. This requires the allocation of land for development. Should decisions be taken to **not** allocate appropriate and sufficient land the expectation is that the local plan will not be in a position where it can be adopted. Amongst other impacts this is likely to lessen or remove controls and influence that this council will have on the type, nature and location of development, notably housing, that may be built in the future, with speculative planning applications, for example, being far more likely. In the absence of a plan we would need to anticipate far more planning appeals with the costs and other impacts that arise from these. There are powers, should a planning authority not produce a local plan, for Government intervention and imposition of a third party to produce a local plan on behalf of the authority.

Links to background information Links are contained in the body of the report.

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- A supported and engaged community
 - Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - Resilient economy that supports local business
 - Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

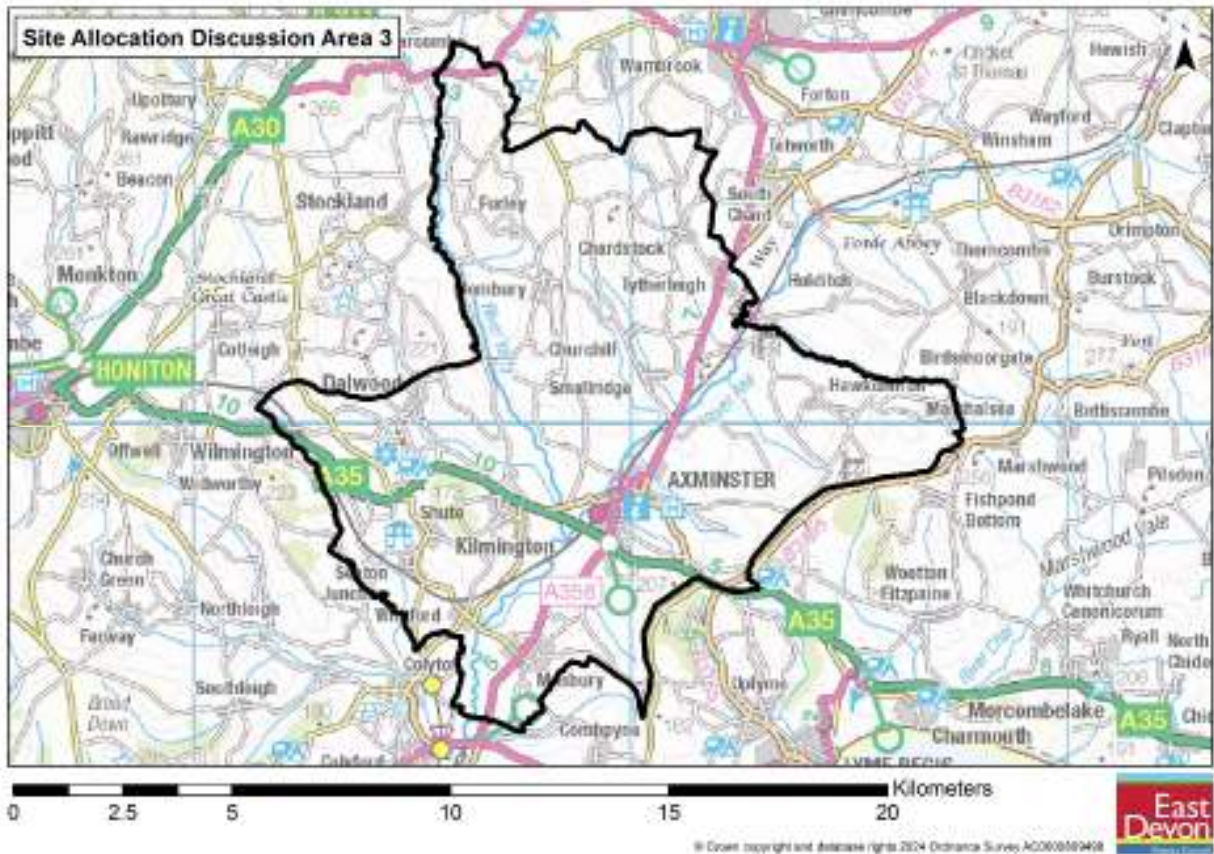
Report in full

1. Introduction

1.1 This report is specifically concerned with proposed sites for allocations for development at and around settlements close to Axminster – these specifically are:

- Axminster
- Kilmington
- Musbury
- Hawkchurch
- Chardstock

The area covered is shown on the map extract below, inside the surrounding black line.



1.2 It should be noted that we are only proposing to allocate sites for development that fall in/at/next to settlements in the draft local plan settlement hierarchy (see [commonplace-reg-18-final-071122.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](https://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/commonplace-reg-18-final-071122.pdf) – Strategic Policy 1). Therefore, other smaller settlements, hamlets and rural areas that fall within the overall black line area above are not included in this report and are not identified as locations for allocation of land for development.

2. Technical assessment of sites and working party considerations

- 2.1 To support site selection work officers have produced technical assessments of site options and choices. The assessment reports for sites that are referenced in this committee report can be viewed in the appendices. These technical reports are amended redrafts of reports that went to Member Working party meetings held in July and August 2024 to reflect discussions held at those meeting and points raised. In addition, there are some amendments to correct matters of accuracy and update on relevant new information.
- 2.2 The technical reports contain summary information only and behind them there is more detailed assessment work in respect of landscape, built heritage and biodiversity considerations. Full reports, with all details (again as might be refined and adjusted in the light of new information), will accompany the local plan when presented to Strategic Planning Committee in November 2024.
- 2.3 The notes taken from the working party meeting for Axminster and surrounding areas can be viewed as an appendix to this paper.

3. Summary of key site allocation recommendations by location

- 3.1 In this section we set out some headline commentary around recommended site allocation choices at the settlements addressed in this report. This is intended to provide an overview of some key considerations. In the next section of this report we list, on a settlement by settlement basis, and in Ward boundary order, all of the sites that have been promoted for development in various calls for sites and that were not sifted out on account of being deemed not developable or not being in accordance with the settlement hierarchy -see [1a. Role and Function of Settlements report v3 final draft for SPC.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#).

Axminster and development options at and around the town

- 3.2 Axminster is the fifth most populous settlement in East Devon, with around 6,000 people, which is less than half the size of Sidmouth and Honiton. The economic activity rate is slightly higher than the East Devon average with a good balance of jobs to workers (1 to 1) and a high degree of self-containment.
- 3.3 Axminster benefits from good levels of infrastructure and facilities, including a train station, secondary school (to age 16), numerous shops and health facilities. It lies close to the borders of Somerset and Dorset, with which there are good transport links and further employment opportunities.
- 3.4 It is recognised that there are issues with traffic through the centre of the town particularly commercial vehicles and HGV's diverted from other routes that then struggle to navigate the narrow streets at the heart of the town. This causes damage to historic buildings and air pollution issues as well as creating a less attractive environment for walking and cycling. In the previous Local Plan, a large urban extension to the east of the town was proposed which included a relief road that sought to help to address these issues, however due to a lack of funding for the relief road this has not been delivered and it seems unlikely that this can now be achieved. It is understood that DCC Transport team have been looking at less costly interventions that could ease issues within the town and control the flow of traffic as well as public realm works that would make the town centre more accessible and attractive for walking and cycling. It is anticipated that developments coming forward in the town would need to contribute to the delivery of these projects through planning obligations.
- 3.5 The individual sites recommended for allocation at Axminster are assessed as being credible and realistic site allocation options to provide for reasonable and appropriate growth at the town. This is specifically so given the strategic importance of the town being very well supplied with services and facilities. Notwithstanding good strategic grounds for higher levels of development it is recognised that constraints do exist and that there are sensitivities associated with development of a number of the recommended site allocations at and around the town.
- 3.6 Whilst the development levels under consideration are high in relation to the existing size of the town, this should be seen in the context of the existing growth strategy for Axminster set out in the adopted local plan and the Axminster Masterplan (2019). This made provision for around 850 dwellings, a relief road, primary school and employment land, but changes to central government funding undermined the viability of the scheme. Parts of the land included in the Masterplan are proposed for allocation in this plan, but is recognised that they will not deliver the same benefits as the full Masterplan scheme. Furthermore, there

are concerns about whether the growth levels could be delivered within the plan period if all the sites are made available at the same time. It would involve a level of house building in the town that has not previously been achieved and raises questions as to whether the market would support this.

3.7 14 sites are proposed for allocation in Axminster, which would yield around 4 ha of employment land and some 1,100 dwellings:

- GH/ED/80 for 225 dwellings
- GH/ED/83 for 140 dwellings plus 0.8 ha of employment
- Axmi_01a for 3.3 ha of employment
- Axmi_02 for 100 dwellings
- Axmi_07 for mixed use including 50 dwellings
- Axmi_08 for 68 dwellings
- Axmi_09 for 270 dwellings
- Axmi_10 for 5 dwellings
- Axmi_11c for 50 dwellings
- Axmi_12 for 9 dwellings
- Axmi_17 for 19 dwellings
- Axmi_18 for 6 dwellings
- Axmi_23 for 10 dwellings
- Axmi_24 for 29 dwellings

Kilmington and development options at and around the village

3.8 Kilmington falls in the fourth tier classification of the settlement hierarchy, and is seen as appropriate to meet local needs. It has a range of facilities and services commensurate with a village of its size and a considerable number of sites were put forward for development.

3.9 It is noted that at the working party meeting there were no objections to the overall development levels proposed, but concerns for community cohesion if they were all developed at the same time. There were also safety concerns about speeding traffic on the busy main road.

3.10 Two sites are proposed for allocation:

- Kilm_09b for 37 dwellings
- Kilm_10 for 5 dwellings.

Musbury and development options at and around the village

3.11 Musbury is a small village with a population of around 500, which places it 45th in terms of scale (although some settlements of a higher ranking are based on parish rather than settlement size). It is a fourth tier settlement that is suitable for meeting local needs.

- 3.12 Musbury has a good range of facilities and services for its population size and is close to a wider range of facilities in Axminster and Seaton. The whole village is in the East Devon National Landscape.
- 3.13 At the working party there was support for additional development to the north of the village on Musb_05. This site did have planning permission as an 'exception' site, but the permission has since lapsed, and a subsequent permission refused. It is not considered that the landscape harm caused to the protected landscape is justified unless there is a proven case for an 'exception' site.
- 3.14 One site is proposed for allocation;
- Musb_01a for 15 dwellings and 0.06 ha of employment.

Hawkchurch and development options at and around the village

- 3.15 Hawchurch is a small village to the east of Axminster and the parish as a whole has a population of around 570, which equates to the 38th largest 'settlement' in East Devon. Hawchurch is a fourth-tier settlement that is suitable for meeting local needs.
- 3.16 The working party highlighted concerns about the lack of public transport and additional development worsening issues on the narrow roads. These are issues that are common with many rural villages in the district, however the Role and Functions of Settlements Study clearly identifies Hawchurch as having a range of services and facilities that make it suitable to accommodate growth. The bus service only runs once a week, however this was noted in the study.
- 3.17 It is also important to note that the shop in Hawchurch is community run by volunteers, however this is the case in a number of other villages. In this case it is located on the only site proposed to be allocated for development and so it will be important for this to be incorporated into the redevelopment of the site to ensure that this important local facility is not lost. If this can be achieved then it is considered that Hawchurch would continue to meet the criteria for a tier 4 settlement under the Role and Function of Settlements study.
- 3.18 There were also concerns about one relatively large allocation being out of proportion to the size of the village and a feeling that smaller development sites allocated through a neighbourhood plan would be preferable. Although this may be the preference of the community it is appropriate for the Local Plan to consider allocations here and a neighbourhood plan has not progressed.
- 3.19 There is an existing employment use on the recommended allocation and the existing agricultural/employment buildings are proposed to be retained in employment use.
- 3.20 Two sites were put forward for development at Hawchurch and one is proposed for allocation:
- Hawk_01 for 38 dwellings and 0.15 ha of employment.

Chardstock and development options at and around the village

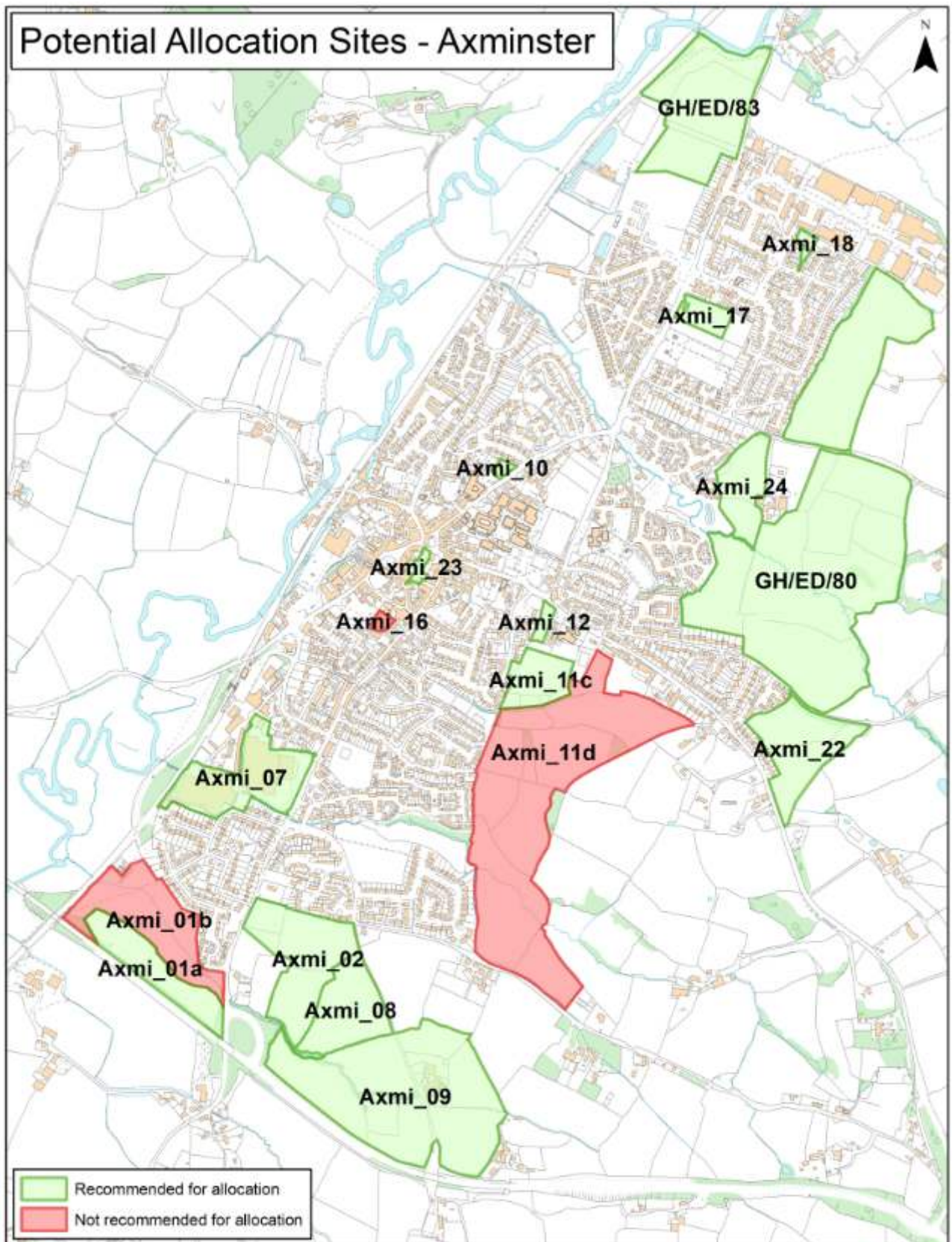
- 3.21 Chardstock has a population of around 290 and is 56th largest settlement in East Devon (although some settlements of a higher ranking are based on parish rather than settlement size). Chardstock is a fourth tier settlement that is suitable for meeting local needs.

- 3.22 The working party expressed concerns about the scale of development in relation to the size of the village and its transport links and facilities.
- 3.23 Three sites were put forward for development at the village and part of one is proposed for allocation:
- Char_04a for 30 dwellings.

4. Sites recommended as allocations to go into the Regulation 19 plan

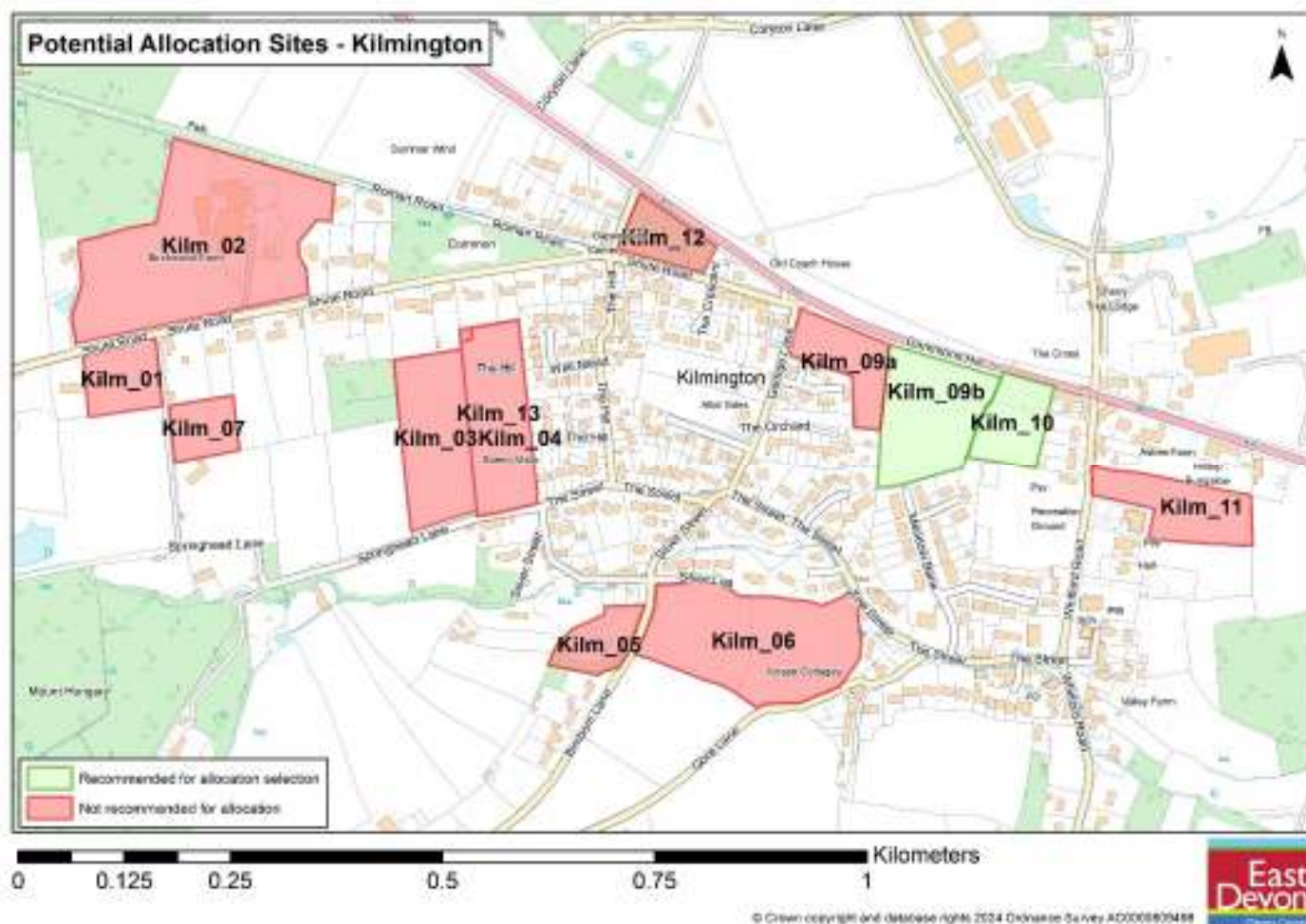
- 4.1 Set out below, in settlement/ward order (for settlements listed and addressed in this report) are lists of sites, as referenced and that feature in the site technical assessment documents. The tables below provide an officer recommendation on whether they should be allocated for development in the Regulation 19 draft of the local plan or not. We do not list sites that have a planning permission for development or that were sifted out from assessment.
- 4.2 For feedback that relates to the sites listed in this section at the draft plan stage of consultation see: [accessible-reg-18-consultation-feedback-report-spring-2023.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](https://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/accessible-reg-18-consultation-feedback-report-spring-2023.pdf) Feedback highlights a range of concerns associated with nearly all sites referenced in this report, whether proposed for allocation or not. There were, however, some favourable comments raised for some sites from a range of respondents and not just the site owners/promoters of those sites.
- 4.3 A spreadsheet showing these allocations will be presented at this Committee, for Members to discuss and endorse (or not), and to show a 'running total' of the number of homes being allocated. This will enable Members to see in real time the impact of decisions to allocate or not allocate sites, in terms of the overall district-wide housing requirement.
- 4.4 The recent further draft Local Plan consultation also sought views on 4 additional sites, namely Axmi_16, Axmi_17, Axmi_18 and Axmi_24. Feedback from the consultation is available as an appendix to this report.

Sites at Axminster



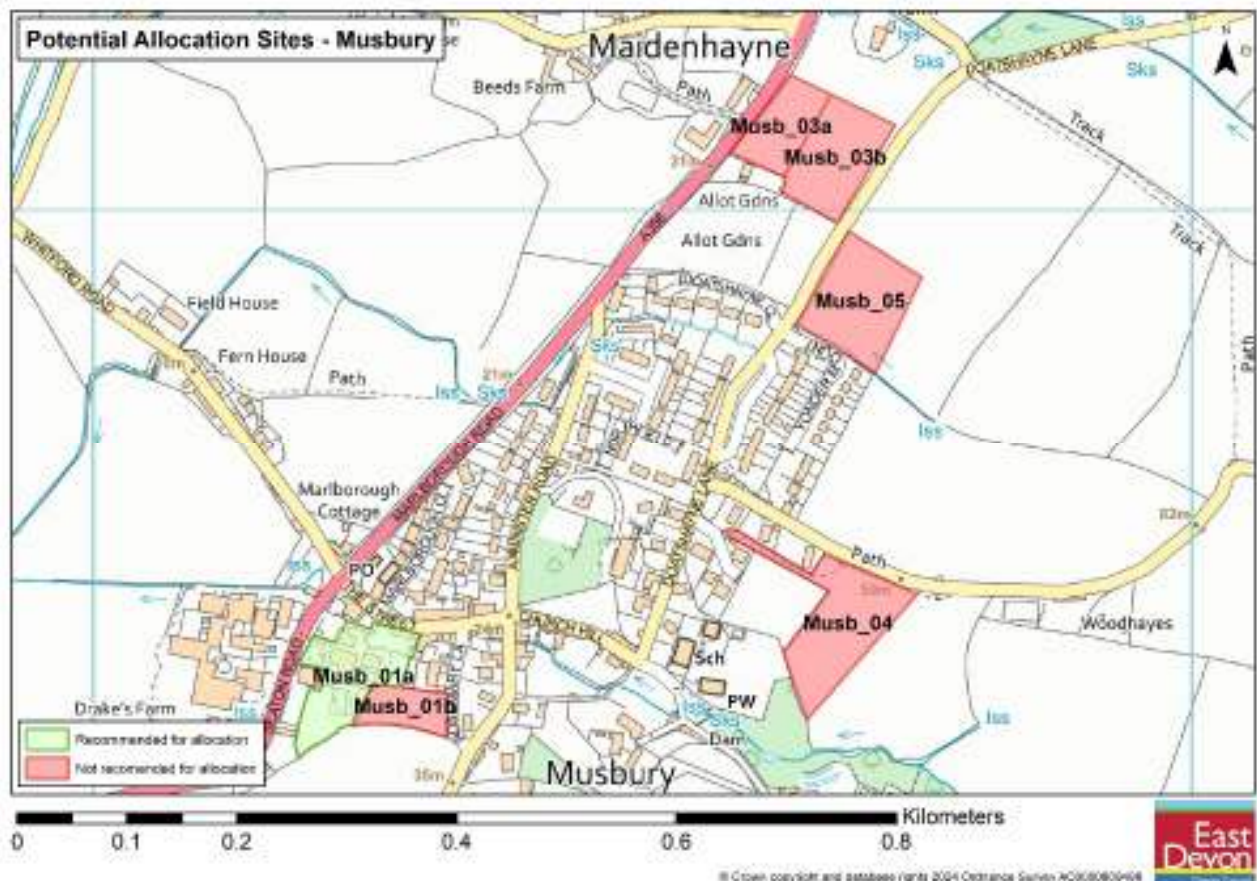
Site reference	Number of dwellings or Ha of employment land	Recommend allocating?	Succinct officer commentary – if relevant (see technical report for full assessment)
GH/ED/80	225 dwellings	Yes	land south of the Mill Brook would be developed for housing – land to the north to be multi-functional public and natural open space.
GH/ED/83	140 dwellings plus 0.8 ha employment	Yes	There is a resolution to grant planning permission (23/0685/MOUT).
Axmi_01a	3.3 ha of employment	Yes	
Axmi_01b	15 (reduced to reflect large area of flood risk).	No	But consider putting in settlement boundary
Axmi_02	100 dwellings	Yes	But may be reduced following archaeological investigation
Axmi_07	Mixed employment with 50 homes	Yes	
Axmi_08	68	Yes	But may be reduced following archaeological investigation
Axmi_09	270	Yes	
Axmi_10	5 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_11d	330 dwellings	No	
Axmi_11c	50 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_12	9 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_16	15 dwellings	No	
Axmi_17	19 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_18	6 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_22	104 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_23	10 dwellings	Yes	
Axmi_24	29 dwellings	Yes	

Sites at Kilmington



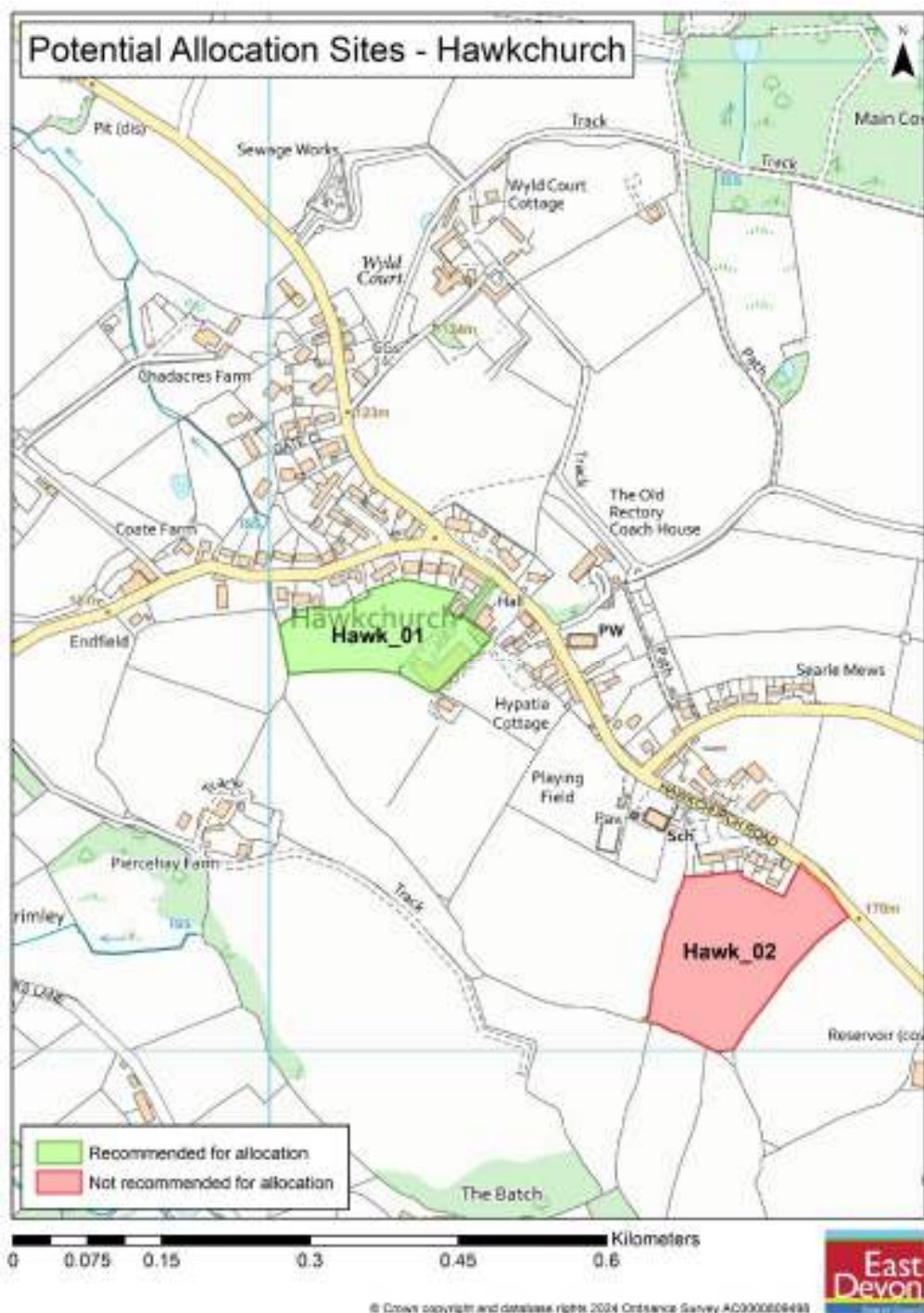
Site reference	Number of dwellings	Recommend allocating?	Succinct officer commentary – if relevant (see technical report for full assessment)
Kilm_01	5	No	
Kilm_02	66	No	
Kilm_03	40	No	
Kilm_05	6	No	
Kilm_06	5	No	
Kilm_07	10	No	
Kilm_09	37	Yes, Partly (Kilm_09b)	Kilm_09a is allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan
Kilm_10	5	Yes	
Kilm_11	10	No	This site is allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan
Kilm_12	5	No	
Kilm_13	50	No	

Sites at Musbury



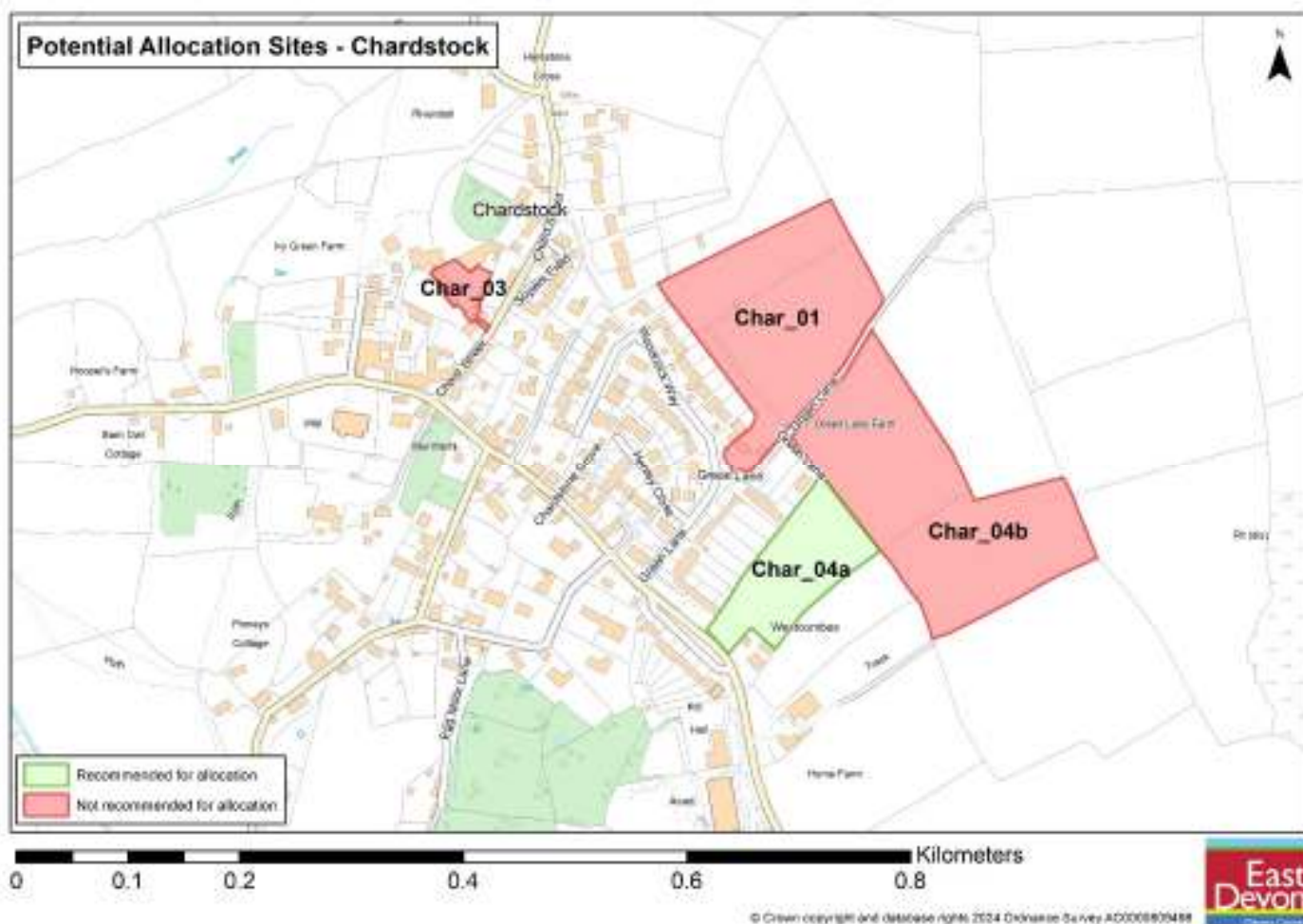
Site reference	Number of dwellings	Recommend allocating?	Succinct officer commentary – if relevant (see technical report for full assessment)
Musb_01a	15 dwellings plus 0.06ha of employment	Yes	
Musb_01b	8 dwellings	No	
Musb_03	25 dwellings	No	
Musb_04	21 dwellings	No	
Musb_05	16 dwellings	No	

Sites at Hawkchurch



Site reference	Number of dwellings	Recommend allocating?	Succinct officer commentary – if relevant (see technical report for full assessment)
Hawk_01	38 houses and 0.15ha of employment land	Yes	Employment uses to include retention of the existing community shop.
Hawk_02	34 houses	No	

Sites at Chardstock



Site reference	Number of dwellings	Recommend allocating?	Succinct officer commentary – if relevant (see technical report for full assessment)
Char_01	44	No	
Char_03	5	No (retain as employment)	
Char_04	30	Yes – part of site only – Char_04a)	

5. Next steps

5.1 Officers will use the resolutions of this meeting to finalise drafting the Local Plan housing requirement, and the allocation of sites to meet this requirement, in the Regulation 19 Publication Local Plan. Depending on outcomes of other committee meetings, that consider other settlements and sites, there may however be a need to revisit site choices. This maybe so if total land allocations recommended for inclusion in the plan, and the dwellings they may accommodate, fall short of the levels of provision that are required to meet Government housing requirements.

5.2 There will, however, also need to be further refinement and testing work on sites, projected delivery rates and constraints (and opportunities) before final conclusions can be drawn.

5.3 As previously discussed, and agreed, the Regulation 19 Publication Local Plan will come to this Committee in November 2024 with consultation scheduled to run from December 2024 to January 2025.

Financial implications:

There are no specific financial implications within the report.

Legal implications:

The legal implications are set out within the report. (002533/September/DH).