

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 13 February 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 2.13 pm. The meeting was adjourned at 12.15 pm and reconvened at 12.30pm and adjourned for lunch at 12.55 pm and reconvened at 1.32 pm.

60 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 9 January 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management updated Members on Minute 55; Resolution 3 from the meeting held on 9 January 2024 advising that the pending technical guidance from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had now been received which confirmed the council was only required to demonstrate a four-year housing land supply instead of the five-year which meant that the council no longer needed to apply the tilted balance when considering planning applications.

61 Declarations of interest

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
All Members of the Strategic Planning Committee advised receiving various lobbying communication on this item.

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Dan Ledger, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Owns property in Seaton directly opposite to a Green Wedge.

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Mike Howe, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Bishops Clyst Parish Councillor.

Minute 68. Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan.
Councillor Kevin Blakey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Cranbrook Town Councillor and a resident of Cranbrook.

Non-Committee Members

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Paul Arnott, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Colyton Parish Councillor.

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Peter Faithfull, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Ottery St Mary Town Councillor.

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Ian Barlow, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Sidmouth Town Councillor.

Minute 65. Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan.
Councillor Geoff Jung advised receiving various lobbying communication on this item.

Minute 68. Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan.

Councillor Kim Bloxham, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Cranbrook Town Councillor and a resident of Cranbrook.

62 **Public speaking**

Rachel Creasy, a resident of Budleigh Salterton spoke on the Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan report, who along with local residents strongly objected to the removal of the Green Wedge for Area 3 and to any consequential development.

Concerns were raised that if the Green Wedge was removed from the west side of Budleigh Salterton and a high density development was positioned close by it would have an overbearing and intrusive effect on the area. In the assessment it was suggested that Site A would be obscured from public view – this was misleading as areas 3 and 5 are elevated and any development would be visible.

Areas 1, 3 and 4 would close the separation of the Green Wedge between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle and the proposed reduction would not be sufficient, Site A would generate additional traffic problems to an already bottleneck single land entry point.

An increase in housing would also put a strain on oversubscribed local facilities including the school, GP Practice and public transport.

The following statement on minute 65 – Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan was read out on behalf of Carole Hooper.

I was one of the many who raised concerns during the last consultation, dated January 2023, as the consultation referred to potential development of the prime agricultural land that is behind our house in Knowle Rd – area 2 as per the Budleigh Salterton to Knowle Green Wedge Assessment. I now understand that that the council proposes to reduce the green wedges originally proposed even further, using the rationale that only a small green wedge is required to maintain the gap between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle village.

I consider the role of the green wedges to be much more than that of maintaining a divide between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle village. Green wedges provide an extra layer of protection against building development and help to maintain the landscape and wildlife in the area. Any proposal to reduce the existing green wedges by such a significant amount puts the land and its wildlife at risk. I cannot help distrusting the motives for reducing the green wedges so significantly.

My arguments against the proposal are:

Effectively the reduction of the green wedges between Budleigh Salterton and Knowle village results in a very small portion of land remaining. Rather dramatically Budleigh Salterton will become much closer to Knowle village – what is there to stop further reduction of this gap on the basis that the gap is too small to be worth maintaining?

There appears to be no discussion or awareness of the value that Knowle Rd brings to the AONB. By allowing such a development the beautiful rural nature of the road would be destroyed .

The countryside along Knowle Rd is beautiful with ancient Devon banks and hedgerows that support the local wildlife. On several occasions I have seen polecats and stoats and

other creatures scurrying across the road from East to West, on their way to the area around Knowle Brook (area 9 as per the Budleigh Salterton to Knowle Green Wedge Assessment). Developing the land would result in the loss of this exceptional landscape and all that it represents for our wildlife and to our community.

I am not the only person who thinks in this way. Knowle Rd is a walkers' paradise. Many people walk down the road every day, far exceeding the cars that use the road. It feeds their souls, as it does mine. To lose the unique quality of this road would be like losing a limb! It is a true social amenity and hundreds of Budleigh / Knowle residents would feel its loss acutely.

Knowle Rd is too narrow as it is to allow cars to overtake one another. Without major widening, the road would not be able to safely cope with the additional traffic resulting from development of 4 and 6 of the Budleigh Salterton to Knowle Green Wedge Assessment. Any development changing the road would represent a loss of the wonderful environment that I have already tried to convey to you.

Finally any further erosion of the green wedges between Knowle Village and Budleigh Salterton would represent pursuing the requirement to building new housing without considering the value of what would be lost in so doing. This is equivalent to knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

The following statement was read out on behalf of Sylvia Meller.

Our green wedges are of massive importance not just for flora and fauna but also for us living here. We need some green spaces for our wellbeing as well as for absorbing rain water to avoid flooding. Reducing the area of green wedges and opening up the possibility of being built on will have a huge impact on the whole ecosystem and people living in the area.

I do understand the need for new housing, but we have a lot of derelict buildings as well as brownsites which can be used for new building sites. One thing we do NOT need are more expensive houses which the locals can't afford, without infrastructure - the current problems we have with South West Water show clearly that they are already overwhelmed with the existing situation.

Please keep the green wedges intact and consider creating even more so not just our but also next generations have a chance to live in a place worth living in and with reduced risks of flooding.

The following statement was read out on behalf of Brian Webb.

Budleigh Salterton is within and forms an integral part of the East Devon AONB and includes the River Otter nature reserve an area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

I object to the Green Wedges being removed, reduced or moved, they are just one of the Residents first lines of defence against the concreting over of our wonderful AONB countryside and coastline.

I and many of the local Residents are committed to ensuring that the status quo of the green wedges be maintained, that our environment is protected for the benefit of future generations of both people and animals and that we avoid development that cannot be supported by the existing infrastructure.

The following statement was read out on behalf of Kevin Bates.

I strongly object to any proposal to reduce the size/location of these important areas.

As well as providing a haven for local wildlife the existing green wedges provide for a distinction, and general separation, between Knowle and Budleigh communities. Although the communities are not 100% separated today if the green wedge was to be reduced as proposed, then the two communities would clearly be almost joined, with no separate identity and just a very small physical separation.

The proposed changes would presumably potentially enable future development which would appear to be unsuitable for this area and would certainly not protect the character of this part of the AONB, which is of course a nationally important landscape designation. Within, and around, the existing wedge are Grade 1 agricultural land, areas prone to flooding each year, rural lanes, views and an ancient lane.

The following statement was read out on behalf of Councillor Ray Steer-Kemp for Bishops Clyst Parish Council.

Bishops Clyst Parish Council have recently been made aware of the fact that the Strategic Planning Committee is proposing to reduce the present area of 'Green Wedge titled 'East of Exeter and south of the A30'

The proposal is to reduce the 'green wedge' area which runs from south of Clyst St George up the Clyst Valley to Sowton and the A30 to the north and replace it with just the small area of flood plain between Clyst St Mary and the motorway. The existing area of green wedge is an essential buffer between the east of the district and Exeter and safeguards the River Clyst Regional Park.

At their meeting on 12 Feb the Parish Council expressed their strong objection to the proposal and their wish that the present 'green wedge' remains as existing.

The following statement was read out on behalf of Councillor Mike Galloway for Bishops Clyst Parish Council.

As the Parish Councillor for Sowton, I must on behalf of Sowton Village and Clyst St Mary lodge a strong objection to the proposed alteration to the existing Green Wedge shown on pages 47 & 48 in the Public Reports Pack.

The only reason for the alteration is to release the area of land designated Sowt 09 from the existing Green Wedge and perhaps this should be looked at as a separate issue with respect to Green Wedge.

Removal of the Green Wedge will remove the protection to Sowton and Clyst St Mary and logic for the proposal should be revisited and any decision should involve the views of the local population affected by the Emerging Local Plan.

Councillor Ian Balow, spoke as a member of the public on the current planning strategy and asked Members to consider whether the council can require officers to do the following on all major planning application:

- To include at least one local ward member and one member of the Planning Committee to attend any pre application meeting or discussions alongside officers; and
- To no longer accept comments from consultees who support applications if the comments clearly show they need to be challenged.

Councillor Geoff Jung speaking as Portfolio Holder for Coast, Countryside and Environment raised concerns about how the council was proposing to reduce over 70% of Green Wedges and drew Members attention to the fourth bullet point of the action plan for the Climate Change Strategy 'Protecting and enhancing the natural environment'. Residents see Green Wedges as the 'green lungs' of our wildlife areas and by reducing the Green Wedges by this magnitude will send out the wrong message that this council does not care about environment protection. Our countryside is our number one asset.

Councillor Jung advised Members there was a vital need to produce a Green Infrastructure Strategy that could sit alongside the Local Plan as a Supplementary Planning Document but was advised this could not be undertaken due to resourcing issues and questioned how to tackle the reduction of our Green Wedges.

63 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

64 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential or exempt items.

65 **Designation of Green Wedges in the new Local Plan**

The Committee considered the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management's report which sought endorsement of the proposed methodology for defining Green Wedges that Members agreed in principle at the meeting on 3 October 2023.

A summary of the proposed changes, the methodology and resulting full assessment were detailed in the appended appendices where in most cases it was proposed to reduce the size of the current Green Wedges. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that although many of the Green Wedges had been carried over from previous Local Plans this cannot be relied upon in the new Local Plan as the constraints of the district will make it increasingly difficult to find suitable sites for development and there is significant risk of challenge at examination if they are carried over again. It is important to have clear robust evidence that will identify areas designated as Green Wedges and the need to show that land is not being protected simply for the sake of it and to show there is a real purpose for the Green Wedges.

Strategy 8 in the adopted Local Plan states 'that within a Green Wedge development will not be permitted if it would add to existing sporadic or isolated development or change the individual identity of a settlement or could lead to or encourage coalescence'. This wording leads to assessments being taken on a case by case basis to determine whether the Green Wedge would be harmed. However, the proposed wording for the Green Wedge policy in the new Local Plan would take away this uncertainty and would prevent development within the Green Wedges unless there was an essential need that could not be located elsewhere.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised it was important to remember that areas where Green Wedges were being proposed to be removed would still be protected as open countryside and in some cases other protections would apply such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National

Landscapes) and flood zones. It was also advised that additional benefits of designation such as for recreational purposes, landscape protection and habitat protection purposes would be best dealt with by other policies and included in the new Local Plan and should not be reasons for designating as a Green Wedge. These could be dealt with by a Green Infrastructure Strategy or a Local Nature Recovery Plan.

Points raised by Members during discussion included:

- Green Wedges are needed to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.
- The concerns raised by Members at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 3 October 2023 have not been implemented in this report.
- There is no mention of the assessment of Green Wedges already in neighbourhood plans. Ottery St Mary Neighbourhood Plan specifically states their Green Wedge which could not be removed.
- It was suggested that the report did not provide Members with sufficient information to truly make an informed decision.
- The maps and images are incorrect and arrows are facing the wrong way.
- The methodology does not take into account the loss of character and essence of a place.
- Support was expressed that the green spaces of special interest would still be protected.
- It was questioned why Green Wedges were proposed to be removed in flood areas.
- It was reported there would be a net loss of 75.7% of our current designated Green Wedges with only one existing Green Wedge remaining the same. Whimple would see a 47% net loss, Budleigh Salterton 70%, Exmouth and Lypstone 84% and West Hill and Ottery St Mary 84%, Clyst St Mary at 99% and the worst affected would be Poltimore which loses its protection entirely.
- Reference was made to the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023 where Members had raised concerns about the evidence criteria that focused heavily on the visual impact on landscapes when in reality the impact would need to focus on more than what can be seen. There is no wording at all in the current report that reflects these comments.

Councillor Todd Olive advised that as the existing Green Wedges had been looked at by external experts including the Planning Inspectorate on three separate occasions including on adoption of the 1995 – 2011 Local Plan and at the adoption of the current Local Plan 2013 – 2031 there is no reason to cut it to pieces and proposed the following motions which were seconded by Councillor Dan Ledger as he believed the methodology was flawed and so much more was needed to protect communities from coalescence.

1. That Strategic Planning Committee cannot agree that the draft Green Wedges as presented are drawn in accordance with the intent of the Committee or with the spirit of the proposed policy.
2. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management, in review of the proposed boundaries in light of the issues raised by Committee and bring a revised proposal with relevant evidence back to Committee as soon as possible for consideration prior to Regulation 18 consultation.
3. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development work with the Portfolio Holders for Strategic Planning and Coast, Country and Environment, as well as relevant Assistant Directors, to scope the potential approach to a new Countryside and Green Infrastructure Strategy and Supplementary Planning

Document and bring a proposal back to Strategic Planning Committee at the appropriate time.

Further points raised included:

- The assessments have not been completed in an efficient and robust way and they clearly have inconsistencies.
- There is a need for an electronic mapping system.
- It was suggested that the Committee had been ambushed with the changes to the Green Wedges and that they are important to protecting our countryside.
- The methodology does not address the aspirations of residents and its imperative that the Green Wedges are kept.
- Support was expressed for the motion made by Councillor Olive as it reflected Members views.
- Support was expressed for a workshop to focus on the wording of the Green Wedge Policy and an invite should be sent to all Members.
- Section 144 of the NPPF suggests that this council qualifies for Green Belts. There is a need to encompass Green Belts in larger developments.

In response to all the points raised the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised it was not officers' intentions to blindside Members and suggested that perhaps Members misunderstood the likely outcome of the methodology which was agreed by Members. He acknowledged that the report needed tidying up and reformatting but thought Members would prefer to input into the draft work as soon as possible and that it was important they did in order to keep to the timetable. He advised that officers could look at the methodology again but they would need a clear steer from Members highlighting exactly where it was incorrect. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management was happy for Members to attend a workshop session which could include Planning Officers to go through individual areas.

In light of the comments received Councillor Todd Olive proposed the following revised motions which was seconded by Councillor Dan Ledger.

1. That Strategic Planning Committee cannot agree that the draft Green Wedges as presented are drawn in accordance with the intent of the Committee or with the spirit of the proposed policy.
2. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management in consultant with the Chair and Vice Chair of Strategic Planning Committee, urgently review the methodology, proposed policy wording and proposed boundaries in light of the issues raised by Committee. With particular regard to accounting for non-visual, intrinsic settlement separation and with input from Ward Members and bring a revised proposal with relevant evidence to a workshop with all Committee Members invited, with conclusions and recommendations brought back to Committee as soon as possible for consideration prior to Regulation 18 consultation.
3. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management work with the Portfolio Holders for Strategic Planning and Coast, Country and Environment, as well as relevant Assistant Directors, to scope the potential approach to a new Countryside & Green Infrastructure and Supplementary Planning Document and bring a proposal back to Strategic Planning Committee at the appropriate time.

4. That a report be brought to Committee as soon as possible setting out the options of exploring a Green Belt designation in the West End of the District.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management sought clarification from Members about what they wanted to achieve from the workshop. Members advised the workshop should be to consider the methodology and that this should be arranged as soon as possible. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised the workshop would need to be before the next Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 5 March 2024.

RESOLVED:

1. That Strategic Planning Committee cannot agree that the draft Green Wedges as presented are drawn in accordance with the intent of the Committee or with the spirit of the proposed policy.
2. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management in consultant with the Chair and Vice Chair of Strategic Planning Committee, urgently review the methodology, proposed policy wording and proposed boundaries in light of the issues raised by Committee. With particular regard to accounting for non-visual, intrinsic settlement separation and with input from Ward Members and bring a revised proposal with relevant evidence to a workshop with all Committee Members invited, with conclusions and recommendations brought back to Committee as soon as possible for consideration prior to Regulation 18 consultation.
3. That the Assistant Director for Planning Strategy and Development Management work with the Portfolio Holders for Strategic Planning and Coast, Country and Environment, as well as relevant Assistant Directors, to scope the potential approach to a new Countryside & Green Infrastructure and Supplementary Planning Document and bring a proposal back to Strategic Planning Committee at the appropriate time.
4. That a report be brought to Committee as soon as possible setting out the options of exploring a Green Belt designation in the West End of the District.

Councillors Collins, Fitzgerald, Hartnell and Levine left the meeting.

66 Designated Neighbourhood Areas Housing Requirement (DNAHR)

The report before Committee updated Members on the findings from an engagement webinar with town and parish councils and neighbourhood plans groups on their responsibilities for land allocations with regard to the Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirement. Members noted that an online survey had also taken place with 43 parish councils responding summarised at paragraph 5.14. There was a mixed response seeing only 9 parish councils indicated they were likely to make housing allocations.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management outlined the two preferred options to help keep the method options simple and straightforward which were set out in paragraphs 7.12 to 7.20.

Option 1 – All housing supply forecast for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2040 excluding an allowance for future windfalls (recommended as the preferred option).

Option 2 – All housing supply forecast for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2040 including an allowance for future windfalls (recommended as the rejected option).

The preferred option would replicate the current approach which would give flexibility to communities on whether they want to see growth.

It is proposed that the consultation would include a straightforward summary document detailing the proposed two main options which would include a summary table giving figures for each area and a technical report which would include all options identified and how the district windfall allowance could be apportioned to Designated Neighbourhood Areas.

Questions raised by Members included:

- Clarification was sought on housing allocation numbers if a town or parish council put forward suggested ideas about additional housing and whether this would be added to their housing allocation numbers. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised additional housing allocation suggestions would be classed as extra. It was explained that it was difficult to account for them any other way as some communities did not want to see growth and some did and yet the Local Plan needs to take a consistent approach notwithstanding this.
- Clarification sought on whether the Regulation 18 consultation would include both the including and excluding windfall sites options. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management confirmed these were the two preferred options but the other options would be detailed in the evidence that it is behind the consultation and could also be commented on.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updated information available from the early engagement with parish councils and neighbourhood plan groups to inform consultation on Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements further to the report on this matter presented to Members in March 2023 be noted.
2. Members agreed that the preferred approach for calculating Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements for consultation purposes should be based on the housing supply forecast for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2040 excluding an allowance for windfalls.
3. That the proposed approach to Regulation 18 stage consultation on the method selection for calculating Designated Neighbourhood Area Housing Requirements set out in the report be agreed in principle, subject to a technical paper for the consultation including the housing requirement figures for each designated neighbourhood area being agreed by Members prior to the consultation launch.

Councillors Blakey and Jess Bailey left the meeting.

67 East Devon Local Plan - approach to redrafting of local plan chapters an revised chapters 1 and 2 of the plan

The report before Members sought endorsement of the proposed approach to Chapter 1 – Introduction and Chapter 2 – Vision and Objectives of the new Local Plan which reflected Members discussions at the last meeting.

Members noted an updated version of the new Local Plan would be brought back to Committee prior to the Regulation 19 Publication.

RESOLVED:

1. That the approach to making amendments to the Local Plan set out in the committee report be endorsed.
2. That the new proposed working draft text for Chapters 1 and 2 of the Plan be endorsed, noting that further minor refinements may be needed later in 2024 and will be brought to Members as part of the Regulation 19 Publication Draft version of the Plan.

68 **Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan**

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management presented the report that sought approval to produce a Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan. He updated Members on the community responses to the consultation regarding the future of the town centre and Members noted the excellent response rate received from residents which was summarised in paragraph 2.3 expressing some excellent ideas to what they would like to see. These responses would then progress to producing a masterplan for the town centre.

Comments from Members included:

- The Chair thanked the residents of Cranbrook for their contributions to enable the Masterplan to progress which he was confident would reflect the views of residents.
- The Chair was pleased to see support for active travel and support for a leisure centre and provisions for cycling and walking.
- Clarification was sought on the timescale for the Masterplan. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management confirmed that he hoped it would be completed by August 2024, acknowledged the need for a project plan and timetable to be developed and said he was happy for the Strategic Delivery Board to oversee the project.
- It was suggested that the Chair and Vice Chair, supported by the Ward Members, should have regular updates about the Masterplan so that pitfalls can be addressed early.
- Members were in support of the Strategic Delivery Board to oversee the Masterplan.

RESOLVED:

1. That the outcomes of the Cranbrook Town Centre consultation be noted.
2. That the production of a Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan be approved and brought to the Strategic Delivery Board to oversee so that any pitfalls could be addressed early before completion in August 2024.

Attendance List

Councillors present (for some or all the meeting)

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

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

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
I Barlow
K Bloxham
C Brown
J Brown
R Collins
P Faithfull
V Johns
G Jung

Officers in attendance:

Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

B Bailey

Chairman

Date: