

.Report to: **Strategic Planning Committee**



Date of Meeting 31 March 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Urban Capacity Study

Report summary:

This report seeks authority to publish work undertaken on production of a study assessing the potential housing capacity within the urban areas of the larger Towns in East Devon. The report also outlines the process undertaken, summarises the findings of the study and notes the implications of this work for meeting the future growth needs of the district.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That Strategic Planning Committee note the work in relation to the Urban Capacity Study summary of findings report and related appendices and endorse its use as evidence to support production of the new Local Plan.
2. That Members note the limited capacity available within the existing built-up area boundaries of the main towns and the need to find substantial land outside of these areas to meet the future development needs of the district.

Reason for recommendation: To provide evidence to support production of the new Local Plan

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action
- Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implication from the recommendations of this report.

Legal implications:

The report and findings are not material considerations in determination of planning applications however will be used to inform Local Plan preparation. There are no legal implications other than as set out in the report.

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [Appendix 1 – East Devon Settlement Assessments; Appendix 2 – Methodology Report](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

1 Background

- 1.1 In the middle of 2019, to support production of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP), East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge authorities agreed to undertake a joint study looking at the potential opportunity to accommodate housing within the existing larger towns. The outputs would have later been used to help inform the role of existing urban areas in the GESP development strategy.
- 1.2 Work was undertaken by Council planning officers beginning in the middle of 2019 and was completed in early 2020, with the aim to publish the study to support the Draft Policy and Options consultation in the middle of 2020. However, following the cessation of the GESP process in mid-2020 the joint study was left unpublished.
- 1.3 Given this Council has now committed to a new Local Plan and initial consultation has been undertaken, it is proposed that the outputs of the study are published as an evidence base to support its production.
- 1.4 Given the main body of work was undertaken some time ago, a light-touch review of the UCS was undertaken in February 2021 in preparation of the report being published. This checked the final list of UCS sites against progress made on planning applications and discounted a site in Exmouth that now has permission for residential development.

2 Process and methodology

- 2.1 The aim of the UCS is to get an understanding of how many possible housing sites with a capacity of 5 homes or greater may be located within already urban areas. To achieve this, the UCS assesses the potential of individual sites to accommodate development within the current built up area boundaries of the main towns as adopted in the East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031 (or in the case of Cranbrook, the current built-extent of the town in the OS map at the commencement of the study). The towns included in the study are as follows:

- Axminster
- Budleigh Salterton
- Cranbrook
- Exmouth
- Honiton
- Ottery St Mary
- Seaton
- Sidmouth

- 2.2 In the middle of 2019, a methodology to undertake the work was prepared by Figura planning. The methodology (which is included in appendix 1) sets out the process by which officers would review the built-up areas in search for potentially suitable sites, gathered from a variety of sources. The methodology uses the built up area boundary to define the study area other than at Cranbrook where one has not yet been defined. At Cranbrook the boundary has been defined by the existing built form at the time of the study, as is appropriate for the purposes of this study, and has no wider meaning or purpose than forming a study area for this work.
- 2.3 The study starts by identifying all undeveloped land within the study area. As a result public open spaces and sports fields are among the areas identified at the first stage of the study. This has been done to ensure a comprehensive and thorough approach to the work and should not be taken to imply that these areas were ever seriously considered for development, indeed they are quickly discounted through the study due to their recreational importance. Following this review stage, identified sites would then be ruled out following a process of reviewing constraints, until a final list of potential sites are formulated.
- 2.4 **Critically, inclusion within this final list of sites should not be considered a substitute for planning permission and the study makes no judgement on whether permission would be granted.** It is likely that some sites included will not be appropriate for development as a result of detailed factors not assessed though the remit of the study.
- 2.5 The UCS instead forms part of the evidence base to inform plan-making and to provide an indication as to the number of larger sites that might come forward in the following years, or which warrant further investigation.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 Copies of the full assessments undertaken for each town are included in appendix 2 of the report. A summary of the conclusions and potential supply are shown below.

	Total potential sites	Total potential supply
Axminster	12	140
Budleigh Salterton	1	10

Cranbrook	0	0
Exmouth	28	427
Honiton	7	74
Ottery St Mary	4	20
Seaton	4	55
Sidmouth	4	40
Total	60	766

- 3.2 It is important to note that even in the unlikely event that all of these sites were brought forward the potential supply of 766 homes represents significantly less than 1 years housing supply coming from land within the existing built up area boundaries of the towns.
- 3.3 The sites identified are all within built up area boundaries and in-principle could be brought forward for development under the current policy framework but for whatever reason have not been pursued. It is generally the case that sites such as those identified trickle through the system over time as windfall sites and so historically resources have not been committed to proactively trying to bring them forward. A proactive approach to their delivery is likely to be highly resource intensive and is potentially fraught with difficulties in terms of tracking down and approaching owners to discuss these sites without being seen to be encouraging an application that may ultimately not be accepted. There is also concern that the resources required to undertake this work would be better directed to other work in terms of local plan production that is likely to lead to more significant benefits in terms of meeting the needs of the district. The work is however useful evidence to inform plan production and also any estimate of the likely numbers of windfall sites that may come forward in the future.