

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 22nd June 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Strategy for the distribution of development – initial overview

Report summary:

This report provides an initial overview of the issues to think about when coming up with a strategy for the distribution of development, for inclusion in the emerging Local Plan. It considers the settlement hierarchy and the broad distribution of development. The report highlights responses made in the recent consultation on the Local Plan Issues and Options, with the intention of stimulating debate on the potential options to consider on the spatial distribution of development.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1) That Strategic Planning Committee consider the various issues and options relating to the strategy for the distribution of development in the emerging Local Plan
- (2) That Strategic Planning Committee note the intention for a further report refining the strategy for the distribution of development to be presented at a future SPC

Reason for recommendation:

To provide an opportunity for Members to consider and discuss issues relating to the spatial distribution of development at an early stage in preparing the emerging Local Plan.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

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

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; The purpose of the report is to stimulate debate on development strategy. Actual decisions on the strategy for distributing development will be made in preparing the emerging Local Plan.

Links to background information [Local Plan 2013 to 2031](#); [Local Plan Issues and Options](#); [National Planning Policy Framework](#); [Agenda for SPC, 4 September 2018 \(item 7\)](#) and [minutes](#)

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
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Report in full

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 20) expects strategic policies in a local plan to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This helps to reduce congestion and carbon dioxide emissions, and improve air quality and public health. The NPPF (paragraph 103) recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport will vary between urban and rural areas.
- 1.2 National policy (NPPF paragraph 83d, 92a) also states that local plans should take a positive approach to the provision and use of community facilities and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities; and enable the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities.
- 1.3 With this national policy in mind, a fundamental part of coming up with a strategy for the distribution of development is to group settlements together where they share similar characteristics in terms of population, jobs, and facilities – the “settlement hierarchy”. This will identify settlements with a range of jobs and facilities, and therefore the most sustainable settlements in principle to accommodate new development.
- 1.4 The settlement hierarchy forms the context for setting out levels of development at each settlement. However, the amount of district-wide housing, plus further evidence (e.g. on land availability, environmental constraints, infrastructure requirements), must be considered before settlement-specific amounts of development are finalised.
- 1.5 Members will be aware that the current adopted Local Plan sets out a spatial strategy for the distribution of development through Strategy 1 and 2. In summary, these policies identify:
 - a) the total amount of housing and employment land to be delivered in East Devon;
 - b) the overall spatial approach to focus development on the West End, followed by the seven main towns, and then villages and rural areas to meet local needs (also known as the “settlement hierarchy”); and
 - c) the number of homes to be delivered in the West End, at each Town, and across the Villages and rural area as a whole.
- 1.6 The recent consultation on the Local Plan Issues and Options (chapter 13) discusses the issues and presents various options in developing a spatial strategy for a new Local Plan.
- 1.7 The purpose of this report is to consider the consultation responses and stimulate debate on points b) and c) above, specifically on the settlement hierarchy and the distribution of development, with a view to bringing a further report that refines the strategy for the distribution of development to the July Strategic Planning Committee (SPC).

2. Local Plan Issues and Options consultation responses

- 2.1 Question 27 in the Local Plan Issues and Options asked whether we should continue with the current Local Plan settlement hierarchy, or have more, or less, villages that may accommodate development. There was little difference in the popularity of these options. Option 1 to retain the same settlement hierarchy as the current Local Plan was marginally the most popular, chosen by 149 respondents, closely followed by option 2 to have fewer villages (143 respondents), and then option 3 for a higher number of villages (142 respondents). An alternative approach was suggested by 83 respondents.
- 2.2 Question 28 sought views on the distribution of development, with a more West End focused approach to new housing development being most popular, with 31% of responses. This was closely followed by continuing the current pattern of development (option 1 – 27%), which would still see most new homes being built at the West End. A smaller proportion of people (16%) supported less focus on the West End and more homes at towns and villages elsewhere in the district.

3. Considering the Strategy for the distribution of development

- 3.1 Officers are currently working on a study on the role and function of settlements, which will contain evidence to inform the settlement hierarchy – it is intended that a draft of this study is presented at July SPC. This will be considered alongside the Issues and Options consultation responses. In coming up with a settlement hierarchy, the following factors will be considered for each settlement:
- Population and age profile
 - Number of jobs, and balance of jobs to workers
 - Number of non-domestic rated properties
 - Commuting patterns
 - Level of different community facilities and services (including train and bus links, schools, shops, healthcare, play and leisure facilities, digital communication)
- 3.2 Those settlements with a higher population, a greater range and number of jobs, community facilities and shops, better connectivity, and serving a wide area, will be placed at the top of the settlement hierarchy. Other, smaller settlements have fewer jobs and facilities, and therefore perform a more local but still important role – these settlements will be grouped lower down the hierarchy.
- 3.3 The current Local Plan settlement hierarchy is relatively simple with the three tiers of the West End, seven Towns, and 15 Villages. In reality the seven Towns vary hugely in size and function, for example Exmouth is far larger than Budleigh Salterton, so one option is to have more tiers in the hierarchy to reflect this, like the 'old' Local Plan (1995-2011). National policy is considered to be more supportive of rural housing (and more housing in general) than previously, to meet local needs and support local services – therefore, it is likely that more villages should be added to the hierarchy.
- 3.4 The amount of development to be attributed to existing settlements will aim to be broadly consistent with the settlement hierarchy. However, the following factors will also be considered in identifying the amounts of housing and employment development at each settlement:
- District-wide housing and employment requirement
 - Environmental constraints (including Habitats Regulations Assessment)
 - Sustainability Appraisal
 - Land availability
 - Infrastructure requirements

- Viability

- 3.5 Once these factors are considered, decisions can be made as to whether to focus more development close to Exeter in the western quadrant of the district; have a more even distribution across the western quadrant and existing settlements; or disperse development more widely to existing towns and villages across East Devon with less in the western quadrant.
- 3.6 If a close to Exeter/western quadrant focussed approach is preferred, given the constraints elsewhere (particularly AONB), this will likely mean one or more new settlements in the western part of the district – further detail on the principles for accommodating future growth were discussed at SPC in September 2018 (item 7):
[040918StrategicPlanningCombinedAgenda.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)
- 3.7 At this stage, the various factors relating to the distribution of development are presented for consideration and to stimulate debate, with further evidence and discussion to come in due course.
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Financial implications:

The function of this report is to provide an initial overview and stimulate debate. As such, there are no financial implications arising from it. The eventual choice and implementation of a strategy may give rise to financial implications but at this early stage in discussions, it is not possible to define them.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications other than as set out in this discussion report.