

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting Tuesday 20 July 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft report

Report summary:

This report explains how settlement hierarchy is a key element of the strategy for distributing development. It presents the findings of 'The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft' as an evidence document to inform the settlement hierarchy in the emerging Local Plan. Members are invited to consider and debate the draft report.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1) That Strategic Planning Committee consider the findings of 'The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft' and endorse its use as evidence to inform production of the emerging Local Plan

Reason for recommendation:

To provide evidence on the role and function of settlements to inform the production of 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 present evidence on the Role and Function of Settlements. 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](#); [Strategy for the distribution of development – initial overview](#), [SPC report 22.06.21, item 11](#) ; [Initial feedback report – local plan issues and options consultations, SPC report 22.06.21, item 7](#)

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 At the last Strategic Planning Committee (June 22) Members will recall discussing a report that provided an initial overview of the strategy for the distribution of development. As mentioned at that meeting, further, more detailed work has been undertaken on evidence to inform the ‘settlement hierarchy’, which is a key element of the strategy for distributing development in the Local Plan.
- 1.2 This evidence – a report on “The Role and Function of Settlements” – has been prepared in draft, and is presented to the committee for discussion and consideration.

2. Local Plan Issues and Options consultation responses

- 2.1 As highlighted at the last SPC meeting, 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 The consultation responses raised a range of issues on the settlement hierarchy, detailed in the initial feedback report (see report in “links to background information”, page 67-70). These issues have been considered in preparing The Role and Function of Settlements report, and a more detailed response on how they have been addressed in preparing the Local Plan will be set out in due course.

3. The Role and Function of Settlements draft report – purpose and key findings

- 3.1 The full Role and Function of Settlements draft report is available on the agenda as an “additional document” – a summary of the key findings is presented below.
- 3.2 The main purpose of The Role and Function of Settlements report is to build up a picture of the settlements in East Devon, and how they relate to each other – i.e. their role and function. Settlements are grouped together and placed in tiers where they share similar characteristics, known as the “settlement hierarchy”. Those places with a higher population and a greater range of jobs, community facilities, better transport and connectivity links, serving a wide area, will be placed at the top of the settlement hierarchy. Other, smaller settlements have fewer jobs and a smaller range of facilities, and therefore perform a more local but still important role. These settlements will be grouped lower down the hierarchy.
- 3.3 The Role and Function of Settlements draft report presents information across the themes of population; employment; and community facilities and services. It concludes by recommending the following settlement hierarchy for inclusion in the emerging Local Plan:

- Tier One – Principal Centre: Exmouth
- Tier Two – Main Centre: Honiton, Sidmouth, Axminster, Seaton, Ottery St Mary, Cranbrook
- Tier Three – Local Centre: Budleigh Salterton, Colyton, Broadclyst, Lypstone, Woodbury
- Tier Four – Service Village: Clyst St Mary, Uplyme, Beer, West Hill, Newton Poppleford, Feniton, Whimble, Kilmington, Otterton, East Budleigh, Dunkeswell, Stoke Canon, Tipton St John, Musbury, Sidbury, Chardstock, Broadhembury, Payhembury, Branscombe, Plymtree, Hawkchurch, Exton, Westclyst

3.4 Exmouth has a significantly higher population, number of jobs, and level of community services and facilities that distinguish it as the ‘principal centre’ in East Devon. The six ‘main centres’ benefit from a range of jobs along with strategic and local facilities, serving both the settlement and wider surrounding area – in Cranbrook’s case some of these facilities are planned to be delivered in the coming years. There are five ‘local centres’ which perform an important local role, with reasonable levels of population and jobs, and a smaller selection of strategic facilities alongside all or most local facilities. A further 23 settlements have a good range of local facilities either in the settlement or nearby, and are ‘service villages’ for both the settlement and immediate surrounding rural area.

3.5 Members will note a few key differences compared to the settlement hierarchy in the current Local Plan 2013-31:

- Exmouth has been separated from the other ‘towns’ at the top of the hierarchy.
- Budleigh Salterton has been grouped together with the larger ‘villages’ as a local centre.
- There are a greater number of villages altogether, a total of 14 more.

3.6 As explained above, it is clear from the evidence that Exmouth is much larger with a far greater range of facilities compared to anywhere else. Budleigh Salterton has a comparable range of facilities to the other four local centres. The (service) villages all contain, or have easy access to, a decent range of local facilities that residents need for day-to-day life. The increased number of villages reflects national policy which is more supportive of rural housing (and more housing in general) than previously, to meet local needs and support local services.

3.7 All of the ‘service villages’ in tier four have at least seven out of 10 local facilities but, in general, it is less clear-cut between the smaller tier four settlements and other potential settlements that are not considered to be tier four. Also for smaller settlements, there is a risk that the loss of one or two facilities in the future could have a significant impact, meaning that it will no longer play the role of a ‘service village’. For this reason, The Role and Function of Settlements report will be amended if any significant changes arise to ensure evidence on the settlement hierarchy remains up-to-date as the emerging Local Plan progresses. Significant changes could include the number of community facilities at a settlement(s), and/or if Census 2021 data is published which changes the findings of the report.

3.8 It is envisaged that places identified in the settlement hierarchy will have a ‘built-up area boundary’ within which development will be accepted ‘in principle’; whilst areas outside will be considered as ‘countryside’ and subject to more restrictive planning policies. However, this will be confirmed in forthcoming work on ‘built-up area boundaries’ that will inform the Local Plan.

3.9 Finally, it is important to note that the Local Plan will set out the scale of development to be delivered at the settlements, and this will aim to be broadly consistent with the settlement hierarchy. However, the precise levels of development at each settlement will be informed

by other work on factors such as housing and employment need, land availability, environmental constraints, infrastructure provision, and Sustainability Appraisal.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 Officers will consider the comments made at this Committee and make amendments as appropriate to The Role and Function of Settlements draft report. Further internal Officer discussions will also be held. Officers will also check the availability of community services and facilities with town/parish councils to ensure the information presented in the report is correct – this is particularly important for smaller settlements where the presence of one or two facilities could mean the difference between it being considered a ‘service village’ or as part of the countryside.
- 4.2 Following completion of these tasks, The Role and Function of Settlements report will be published as an evidence document to inform the emerging Local Plan (albeit subject to change and further consideration by Members if new evidence arises, as discussed above in paragraph 3.7).

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications requiring comment

Legal implications:

In developing a sound Local Plan we must ensure there is clear and reliable evidence to support the development of our policies, other than that there are no legal implications other than as set out in the report