

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting Tuesday 5 October 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

The Role and Function of Settlements – Final Draft

Report summary:

Following discussion on 'The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft' at the July SPC, this report updates Members on the engagement undertaken since that meeting, and presents a 'final draft' as an evidence document to inform the settlement hierarchy in the emerging Local Plan. Members are invited to consider and debate the final draft report.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1) That Members consider the findings of 'The Role and Function of Settlements – FINAL 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](#); [Minutes of SPC, 20.07.21](#)

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. Background

- 1.1 At Strategic Planning Committee on July 20, Members will recall discussing ‘The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft’ (available in “links to background information”). By way of a brief reminder, 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, and will be grouped lower down the hierarchy.
- 1.2 At the July SPC it was resolved that all Members be invited to submit comments on the ‘draft study’. In addition, the SPC report stated that further internal discussions would be held, and that Officers will check the availability of community services and facilities with town/parish councils to ensure the information presented in the report is correct.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to highlight the comments received from Members and town/parish councils, and present a final draft of ‘The Role and Function of Settlements’ as evidence to inform the emerging Local Plan.

2. Member comments on “The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft”

- 2.1 Member were invited to submit comments on ‘The Role and Function of Settlements – Draft’ over a period of three weeks from Friday 23 July until Friday 13 August. Two Members submitted comments, the main points of which are summarised below:
 - a) Satisfied with the settlement hierarchy in the report, and opposed to ad-hoc development in the open countryside including in villages without built-up area boundaries.
 - b) The proximity of services should be taken into account, even if outside the actual village. Ebford is such an example, being in proximity to the St George and Dragon pub and Dart’s Farm, where small-scale development should be allowed to enable younger families to move in – such development can often bring infrastructure improvements.
 - c) Increase in home-working and electric car use may make village living more attractive and more sustainable. Assumption that village residents don’t want expansion is not always the case.
 - d) The hierarchy of settlements is informative and well-researched, but don’t want it to become a hierarchy of favoured areas for development. A fourth category of settlements that have some facilities would be helpful.

- 2.2 In response to point a), it is envisaged that the emerging Local Plan will set out policies that explain the approach to be taken to development proposals in the open countryside.
- 2.3 On point b), agree that the proximity of facilities should be taken into account when considering the role and function of settlements, and this is discussed in paragraphs 4.10-18 of the draft report. Indeed, an important reason for Exton and Westclyst being identified in tier four is the proximity to the range of facilities elsewhere. Westclyst and Exton do at least have a few local facilities within the settlement itself, whilst Ebford does not. Small-scale development may still be acceptable within settlements like Ebford which fall below tier four through rural exceptions sites, and community led development in a neighbourhood plan.
- 2.4 For point c), agree that increased home working and electric vehicles may make living in a village more attractive, but national policy remains to focus significant development on locations which are or can be made sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering genuine choice of transport modes (NPPF paragraph 105); whilst in rural areas, housing should reflect local needs (NPPF paragraph 78).
- 2.5 Finally on point d), a range of other evidence will inform the amount of development at the settlements, including housing and employment need, land availability, environmental constraints, infrastructure provision, and Sustainability Appraisal. It would be difficult to create a further category simply based upon the number of facilities, as some proposed tier four settlements have fewer facilities than others, but are included as they have easy access to those elsewhere (i.e. Westclyst, Exton). As previously stated, rural exceptions sites, and community led development through a neighbourhood plan can bring forward housing at settlements below tier four. There does not appear to be a clear grouping or cut-off point below tier four.
- 2.6 In addition, several points were made at July SPC itself. As a result, “sports playing pitch” has been added to the list of facilities and services being considered in the study. To avoid duplication with the previous category of “open space/allotment”, allotments are identified as a separate category.
- 2.7 Some Members at July SPC also suggested creating additional tiers in the settlement hierarchy due to concerns that any settlements below tier four “would be cast out into the open” with no additional development allowed. It was advocated a “trickle” of houses should be allowed in the smallest rural villages “to keep them ticking over”. It is not considered that creating extra settlement tiers will help with this. To reiterate the points above, it is likely that rural exceptions sites, and community led development through a neighbourhood plan would still be delivered at settlements below tier four (as can happen now for the villages not listed in Strategy 27). The benefit is that such homes can meet an identified local need, particularly for affordable housing, rather than general market housing where occupancy is not controlled and could potentially become a second home.
- 2.8 In terms of allowing homes in smaller settlements (below tier four) as a way of supporting services, whilst any amount of development in a rural settlement will provide some benefit in helping to sustain existing local services, the level of population growth required to make a difference (e.g. to support a bus service or a new pub or shop) is significant – further detail has been added to the study (in figure 4.4) to reflect this point.

3. Town and parish council responses to Community facilities and services “fact-check”

- 3.1 Town and parish councils were given the same period (July 23 to August 13) to “fact-check” the number of community facilities and services in their particular settlements, contained in figure 4.2 of the report. A total of 17 town/parish councils responded – a summary of key points and changes made as a result is set out below:
- Add facilities at various settlements (e.g. add library at Broadclyst, community hall at Rewe).
 - Remove facilities included in error (e.g. remove Stockland convenience store, open space/allotment at Rewe).

- There was some uncertainty as to the “definition” of some facilities, so explanation has been added to chapter 4 to provide greater clarity.
- Text added to explain that places of worship often play an important role in the community, but are not included in the list of facilities as they are present in practically all settlements and would not help to distinguish the settlement hierarchy.
- Some parishes queried why their settlements were not included in the “long list” of 60 settlements being considered in the study. As a result, text has been added to chapter 2 to explain that only settlements with a reasonable prospect of being included in the settlement hierarchy have been ‘scoped in’ to the study. Alternatively we could try and list every small village and hamlet, but this would involve additional time and effort for limited reward, data availability becomes more difficult at such small geographic levels, and it would be difficult to identify every small village/hamlet and also to judge where to have a cut-off point.

4. The Role and Function of Settlements – Final Draft – key findings

4.1 As highlighted above, several changes have been made to The Role and Function of Settlements study since the draft was considered at the July SPC. A ‘Final Draft’ report is available on the agenda as an “additional document”. The settlement hierarchy recommended for inclusion in the emerging Local Plan remains as previously:

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

4.2 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 easily accessible nearby, and are ‘service villages’ for both the settlement and immediate surrounding rural area.

4.3 Although Exton and Westclyst have slightly fewer facilities than other tier four settlements, both places are within easy access of a wide range of facilities and jobs nearby. Clyst St George has also been considered as an example of a settlement with fewer facilities but access to other facilities and jobs elsewhere (in this case, retail at Darts Farm, the 15 minute bus frequency to Exeter and Exmouth, and the Exe Estuary Trail). The distance to these facilities from Clyst St George is walkable at around 900m, but the need to cross two busy roads with no pedestrian crossings is a safety concern which means that walking is not a reasonable prospect.

4.4 At 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 – such 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.

- 4.5 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.

5. Relationship with neighbourhood plans

- 5.1 The Role and Function of Settlements report is 'only' evidence – actual decisions on the settlement hierarchy will be made in the Local Plan itself as it progresses. Nevertheless, there are some key points that are worth highlighting at this stage on the relationship of The Role and Function of Settlements report with neighbourhood plans.
- 5.2 It is envisaged that places identified in the settlement hierarchy will have a built-up area boundary (BUAB) within which development will be accepted 'in principle'; whilst areas outside will be considered as 'countryside' and subject to more restrictive planning policies (there is another report on this SPC agenda discussing this). In addition, there are a greater number of 'villages' compared to the current Local Plan 2013-31, a total of 14 more. This reflects national policy which is more supportive of rural housing (and more housing in general) than previously.
- 5.3 Given the above, there are some proposed tier four settlements that may have a BUAB which do not have one at the moment (namely Otterton, Dunkeswell, Stoke Canon, Tipton St John, Chardstock, Broadhembury, Branscombe, Plymtree, Hawkchurch, Exton, Westclyst). On the other hand, The Role and Function of Settlements report includes one made neighbourhood plan (Payhembury) which has a BUAB despite not being a larger village in the current Local Plan.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 Following discussion at this SPC, a final version of 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 if new evidence arises, as discussed above in paragraph 4.4).

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications requiring comment.

Legal implications:

This study and report are building up the Council's evidence base to support the development of Sound local plan policies, there are no legal implications other than as set out in this report.