

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 9 November 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

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Review date for release N/A

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## Site Promoter Presentations to Strategic Planning Committee

### Report summary:

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 27 April 2021 Members considered a report on the issue of engagement with site promoters through the local plan preparation process and resolved to undertake engagement through the Strategic Planning Committee. At that time it was envisaged that Committee would hear presentations from developers and site promoters at a special meeting in November. This report sets out a proposed way of accommodating requests to present to the Committee albeit later than anticipated so that Members can consider them in the context of an emerging strategy for growth which can be used to focus the presentations on the genuine options to be considered.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

- (1) That Members note officers will proceed with arrangements for a Special Strategic Planning Committee meeting to hear presentations from developers and site promoters of sites being considered for allocation in the new Local Plan on the basis of the details given in this report and as discussed in the meeting.

### Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that developers and site promoters have the opportunity to present their proposals to the committee and Members can fully consider the site options presented.

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### Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information** [Local Plan engagement with site promoters through the Local Plan process report.](#)

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

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## Background

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021 Members considered a report on the issue of engagement with site promoters through the local plan preparation process. Five options for doing this were presented and Members resolved to pursue option 5 which was described in the report as follows:

*“Engagement through Strategic Planning Committee only*

*A further option would be to provide an opportunity for developers and site promoters to present through Strategic Planning Committee. The agreed timetable for plan production proposes a debate of potential site options by the Committee in November. It is considered that part of this meeting could include providing a time slot for developers and site promoters to present to the Committee to aid Members understanding of the options prior to making decisions regarding which options they wish to put forward for consultation in the draft plan. It is considered that this option presents the most open and transparent option given that the presentations would then be given in a public meeting that is minuted by Democratic Services. It would also ensure that all of the committee could hear each presentation whereas this would be difficult to accommodate if separate meetings were to be held for each site. It could however lead to the need for an additional committee meeting in November to accommodate this given the other areas of work set to be considered in November. It may also cause some frustration among developers and site promoters if they have to wait until much later in the year to engage more fully in the process. They may also not wish to make their plans open to wider public scrutiny but clearly this would be their choice. If this approach is favoured it is suggested that a special committee meeting be arranged and that each presentation be time limited to ensure parity across all of the sites being presented and to fit the time available.”*

It was resolved to set up a special meeting of the Committee in November to hear presentations from developers and site promoters. Since that time the plan preparation timetable has evolved as the number of sites put forward for the HELAA was higher than expected and it has taken more time than expected to assess them and establish a HELAA panel. As a result it is no longer the intention to present site options to Members in November and these will now come forward as part of the working draft of the plan to be presented to Members at their December meeting. There is therefore a need to revisit the timetabling of the meeting to hear presentations from site promoters and developers. This report also presents an opportunity to consider the format of such a meeting in more detail as well.

## **Timetable**

The working draft of the Local Plan is likely to be the only substantive item on the agenda for the December meeting but will need detailed consideration by Members so that officers can be given clear instructions regarding the direction the work should be taking. It is not therefore envisaged that it would be appropriate to include other items on this agenda but to leave ample time for debate of the many issues that the working draft of the plan will highlight.

The working draft of the plan will include a number of sites identified as preferred options at this stage but also a number of options that have been considered by officers but are not favoured. The site allocations are therefore very fluid at this stage and so it is considered that it would not prejudice Members consideration of the presentations from developers and site promoters if these were not heard until the new year. Indeed it is considered preferable that the presentations are made once Members have considered a working draft of the plan. This is because sites need to be considered in the context of a strategy for growth and with some understanding of where Members would like to see growth located. Otherwise there is a danger that sites may appear acceptable when viewed in isolation but they may not fit into any logical wider strategy for growth. Therefore it is important that Members have a coherent strategy in mind when hearing presentations on sites.

## **Meeting Format and Organisation**

It is considered that there are a number of options in terms of how to organise the meeting. The main issue is how presenters are selected/identified. We could write to all those who have put sites forward and ask them if they wish to make a presentation to the committee. There are however 359 HELAA site submissions being considered and so if the majority or indeed all wanted to make a presentation then this would take up many days of Committee time.

An alternative approach would be to not explicitly invite parties to present to the committee but simply state on our web-site as part of the published agenda for the meeting details of how to register if they wish to present in the same way that public speakers register. We have already had interest from 10 – 12 parties who wish to present to the committee having seen the previous report to committee on this issue. The expressions of interest received so far suggest that interested parties are watching progress of the plan through the Committee meetings and reading the agendas and so it is likely that they are aware of this discussion. If a few others came forward it would be possible to hear a short presentation from each with time for questions in a single full day meeting. Members may however be happy to spend more than a day hearing presentations and wish to explicitly invite parties to present. Member's views on this issue are sought.

In either event Members may wish to rationalise the list of presenters in some way. If so then it is considered that initial assessments of site suitability should be used. There seems little point in Members hearing a presentation from a developer promoting a site for residential development that is for example in an AONB and entirely within an area at the highest risk of flooding. Such a site would have been quickly discounted by officers on clear planning grounds. However there will be various site options around the main towns for example where the sites may fit with a coherent strategy for growth and where there are no overriding constraints that would rule the sites out of inclusion in the plan. In such cases subjective assessments about landscape impact, issues of access etc will have informed officer's views and presentations from a developer or site promoter may genuinely help to inform judgements on the acceptability of these sites. It is considered that it is these sorts of sites where committee's time could be well spent hearing presentations from the respective developer or site promoter.

In the working draft of the plan officers will summarise their consideration of each of the site options at the main settlements and provide a suitability score on a scale of 1 – 6. To avoid Members time being taken up hearing presentations on sites that have no reasonable prospect of being acceptable it is considered that if Members wanted to restrict the number of presenters then

requests for presentations on sites with a score of less than 3 could be declined. If this is the case then presentations could focus on those sites scoring 3 or more where sites are either borderline in terms of their acceptability from officer's assessment or are supported by officers. In these cases having a greater understanding of the site and the issues associated with them would aid Members consideration. An alternative approach to rationalise the presentations would be to use the size of sites and their capacity as a measure of how important it is that Members hear a presentation on the site. This would ensure that large urban extensions and new community proposals are prioritised, however there are relatively few of these and sufficient time to accommodate these within any schedule. It should also be noted that we are required to allocate more small sites as part of government guidance to support small and medium size builders as well as self and custom builders. Members' views on rationalising any list of parties wishing to present to the committee in this way or alternative ways are sought.

Based on the above discussion of the issues officers have sought to balance the intention to be open and transparent with the need to make efficient use of officer and Member time and propose the following format for the meeting:

- A single full day meeting (10am to 5pm) with a 1 hour lunch break and 10 minute comfort breaks in the morning and afternoon;
- 20 minute slot per site (comprising 10 -15min presentation followed by questions from Members);
- Based on a 7 hour day this would give a maximum of 20 presentation slots;
- An agenda to be published beforehand with interested parties invited to register to present to the committee by a stated deadline;
- In the event that demand exceeded the number of slots then a cascade applies whereby sites are refused a slot based on the lowest scoring sites in the suitability scoring being excluded;
- A list and timetable of presentations to be produced taking sites in settlement hierarchy order from top to bottom and then alphabetically through each tier;
- The meeting to be held virtually and broadcast on you-tube.

The above arrangements would hopefully enable appropriate engagement with site promoters and developers and make efficient use of officer and Member time. It is envisaged that the meeting would now take place as a special meeting towards the end of January. It is considered that even if Members have returned to meetings in person by that time then this meeting could still be held virtually as no items would be presented for decision. A virtual meeting would also be easier to manage given the number of likely attendees and the likely use of power point presentations.

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### **Financial implications:**

There are no financial implications on which to comment.

### **Legal implications:**

There are no legal implications from this discussion report.