

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## Further Engagement with Developers and Site Promoters to inform Local Plan Production

### Report summary:

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Members resolved to set aside two days of Committee time to hear presentations from developers and site promoters on sites put forward for allocation in the new Local Plan. On the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January Members heard 33 presentations on various sites, however we had received interest from representatives of a further 27 sites who also wished to present but were unable to do so. A small number of other parties missed the deadline to register their interest in presenting or have subsequently come forward saying that they were unaware that such an opportunity was available and would have registered their interest in presenting at the meeting had they known. This report seeks Members views on how to handle the remaining requests and whether additional committee time should be set aside to hear the remaining presentations.

The report also seeks Members views on wider engagement with developers and site promoters as work progresses on the new Local Plan.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

### Recommendation:

1. That Members consider the report and recommend to senior officers how they wish to respond to the remaining requests for presentations to Strategic Planning Committee and specifically whether more time be set aside to hear presentations from developers and site promoters and if so when and how the meetings should be arranged.
2. That Members recommend to senior officers that officers be able to meet with developers and site promoters where this is necessary to gain further information and evidence on a site to inform assessment work provided such meetings are minuted.

### Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that additional requests from developers and site promoters to present their proposals to the committee are considered.

Officer: Ed Freeman – Service Lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management

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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** [4.Local Plan Engagement Report.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

**Link to** [Statement of Intent](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better Homes and Communities for all
- Greener East Devon
- A resilient Economy
- Services that matter

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## Background

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Members resolved to set aside two days of Committee time to hear presentations from developers and site promoters on sites put forward for allocation in the new Local Plan. On the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January Members heard 33 presentations on various sites, however we had received interest from representatives of a further 27 sites who also wished to present but were unable to do so. A small number of other parties missed the deadline to register their interest in presenting or have subsequently come forward saying that they were unaware that such an opportunity was available and would have registered their interest in presenting at the meeting had they known.

Member's resolution on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 instructed officers to prioritise the mid-scoring sites in officer's initial site assessment and so sites that had been scored as "poor" or "fair" were all given presentation slots. Other sites that had scored above or below these levels were not covered by the presentations. Sites within the area of search for a potential new community were also included within the presentations even though scoring of these sites had not been published given that it would not be directly comparable with other sites and was considered premature to do so.

A number of the parties that were unable to present their sites at the January meetings are aggrieved that they could not present and would value an opportunity to do this. This raises questions as to whether Members would want to set aside more committee time to continue this exercise and hear presentations about the remaining sites and if so how and when Members would want to do this.

## Options

### 1. Set aside more time for developer presentations at this stage

This option has the benefit of enabling the remaining parties to present their sites at this early stage of plan production and would represent the fairest approach by enabling all parties to present at the same point in plan production. Members were however clear at

their November meeting that it was the mid-scoring sites where officers assessment was not clear cut over whether the site should be allocated that they wanted to hear presentations from and this has already been achieved through the January meetings.

## **2. Set aside time for more developer presentations at a later stage of plan production**

This option would enable the remaining parties to present their sites but enable some further refinement and targeting of site presentations by delaying further presentations until there is greater clarity over the proposed strategy and policy direction. It would also enable a potential further call for sites to take place to help to meet the shortfall in housing sites and for additional sites to be able to present as well.

## **3. Do not set aside any more time for developer presentations**

This approach could be justified since there is no requirement for committee to hear presentations from site promoters and the January meetings have met the brief given to officers by Members at the November meeting of enabling all mid-scoring sites to present. As mentioned this approach has however left some parties feeling aggrieved.

## **Meeting Format and Organisation**

In the event that Members are minded to set aside more time to hear presentations from developers and site promoters Members are asked to consider whether any changes to the meeting format and organisation are required compared with the January meetings.

Members will recall that no parties were specifically invited to put forward their site for a presentation with the opportunity simply being identified in the minutes to the Strategic Planning Committee. This led to a high level of interest but has left some parties who were not aware of the opportunity to register for a slot feeling aggrieved. There may of course be others that remain unaware of the opportunity but who would have liked to make a presentation. Members are however reminded that 359 sites were submitted through the HELAA and so significant resources would be required to write to them all and it would not be feasible for Members to hear a presentation about all of these sites.

Based on Members resolution at the November 2021 meeting the January sessions were organised on the following basis:

- Two full day meetings (10am to 5pm and 9.30am to 5pm respectively) with a 30 minute 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);
- An agenda was published beforehand with interested parties invited to register to present to the committee by a stated deadline;
- As demand exceeded the number of slots a cascade was applied whereby priority was given to mid-scoring sites in officers initial assessments;
- A list and timetable of presentations was put together taking sites in settlement hierarchy order from top to bottom and then alphabetically through each tier;
- The meetings were held virtually and broadcast on you-tube.

In reflecting on the two days of presentations heard in January it was notable that while the meeting ran to schedule on the 25<sup>th</sup> on the second day the meeting ran ahead of schedule for most of the day. This was because a number of the presentations were on smaller scale sites and the presentations and subsequent question and answer sessions were shorter. Members may therefore considered that a shorter time slot for smaller sites may be appropriate to avoid this happening at any future meeting.

There was also an unfortunate case where the site promoters sought to present a site there was far larger than that which had been put forward in our call for sites. Another party also presented on additional land adjoining the sites to which they had been allocated a presentation slot at the meeting under the guise that the additional land would deliver some form of relief road. It is considered that clearer guidance will be needed for developers and site promoters to try and avoid such issues arising at future meetings.

Members views on these arrangements and any changes needed following their experience at the January meetings are sought.

### **Wider Engagement with Developers and Site Promoters**

Since the January presentations officers have been approached by some parties wishing to discuss their site proposals with officers. In some other cases officers are mindful that to inform further assessment work of sites there would be benefit in having some further interaction with developers to establish what further information they may have to inform assessment work.

Previously Members had resolved that interactions with developers and site promoters be through the Strategic Planning Committee meetings to ensure openness and transparency. However since then all of the sites being considered have been published and initial assessment work made available. In addition presentations have been given in public of many sites being considered. The principles of openness and transparency have therefore been well established through the Local Plan work and will continue as further assessment work comes forward. However as work progresses on the detailed assessment of sites particularly with regard to viability and deliverability issues it is increasingly important that officers can speak with developers and site promoters to understand what information they may hold and talk through proposals to ensure that sites can meet the requirements of government policy that they be viable and deliverable. It is therefore recommended that officers be enabled to meet as required with developers subject to minutes of any meetings being taken and held on record.

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### **Financial implications:**

There are no financial implications.

### **Legal implications:**

There are no legal implications from this discussion report.