

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting 8th March 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

New Community and Infrastructure Provision – Evidence and Timeline

Report summary:

This report follows Members consideration of the working draft Local Plan at their meeting of the 8th February 2022 where Members resolved to receive a report on a new town and infrastructure provision. This report seeks to summarise the work that has been undertaken so far on a new community and sign posts Members to the various reports and supporting information. The timeline for further evidence that is being commissioned is set out and has been designed to ensure that Members have a full portfolio of evidence to inform future decision making on this issue.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Members:

- 1. Note the previous reports and debates that have taken place on the issue of a further new community, infrastructure requirements and delivery vehicles.**
- 2. Agree in principle to the inclusion of a new community as part of the spatial strategy within the working draft Local Plan subject to this being reviewed as further evidence comes forward.**

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that Members are aware of the work that has been undertaken on a new community, infrastructure provision and delivery vehicles and that this helps to inform consideration of the spatial strategy proposed within the working draft Local Plan.

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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 See links within the main body of the report.

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

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

Background

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 8th February 2022 Members in considering the spatial strategy for the new Local Plan considered that they needed a further report on the proposed option of a new community and the delivery of infrastructure to support it. This report is intended to respond to this request with a report detailing the reports that have previously been brought to Members on these issues and signposting Members to those reports and supporting evidence documents. The report then details the work that is currently on-going and to be progressed over the coming months to develop a robust and comprehensive evidence base. In the meantime it is hoped that this report will enable Members to give further consideration to the principle of a new community as part of a strategy to meet the growth needs of the district.

Past work

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 4th September 2018 Members considered a report entitled “Principles for Accommodating the Future Growth Needs of East Devon”. It can be found at: [040918StrategicPlanningCombinedAgenda.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#). This report detailed the constraints of the district including the coastline, AONB’s, flood zones, protected habitats etc. and identified key principles for accommodating growth in the future. These principles have helped to inform production of the working draft local plan. Included in the report was also consideration of locations for accommodating growth. The report acknowledged the constraints of many of the existing settlements that would limit their ability to accommodate growth. The report then assessed options for accommodating growth in the “north west quadrant of the district” which is much less constrained. These options included focusing growth around one or more existing villages, establishing a new town or establishing a number of new villages. The report did not reach any firm conclusions on these options but did recommend a series of principles for locating growth in the district. These were:

- “A significant proportion of growth to be accommodated within the western part of the district.
- Accommodate growth in the existing towns focusing strategic growth around Axminster, Exmouth, Honiton and Ottery St Mary with the remaining towns taking more modest growth to meet the needs of those settlements.
- Villages to bring forward modest levels of growth to meet their own needs through neighbourhood plans.

- Focus development around main transport corridors where possible”

Members resolved that “...the proposed principles for growth as the basis for future discussion and consultation on accommodating growth in the district be endorsed.”

As a result these principles have helped to guide officer’s work through the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and more recently through work on the new Local Plan.

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 22nd October 2019 Members considered a report on “Garden Communities and Delivery Vehicles”. The report can be found at: [2SPC Garden Communities and Delviery Vehicles 091019.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#). The report highlighted the Governments Housing White Paper of 2017 and its target of delivering 300,000 homes per year. It also drew Members attention to the Independent Review of Build Out led by Sir Oliver Letwin MP. The review advocated significant additional powers for local planning authorities in relation to large sites of over 1,500 units. This included giving local authorities clear statutory powers to purchase the land for such large sites compulsorily at prices which reflect the value of those sites once they have planning permission and a masterplan that reflect new diversity requirements (in terms of the range of house types and tenures). Further powers to control the development of large sites through the involvement of Local Development or Infrastructure Development Companies were also advocated by the review.

The report went on to highlight the government’s Garden Communities Programme prospectus. The prospectus invited bids for ambitious, locally supported, proposals for new garden communities at scale. The prospectus offered tailored assistance to help design and deliver the vision for these places. The expectation of Government was for local areas to deliver significant housing and economic growth in locations where there is sufficient demand for housing. An Exeter and East Devon bid had been successful and anticipated the delivery of circa 20,000 homes both within and outside of the city under garden community principles. This was linked to the Liveable Exeter programme and projects in Teignbridge as well as potential growth options within East Devon.

The 22nd October 2019 report also introduced issues around delivery vehicles to ensure that the Council had sufficient control over what is delivered and how including the suitable provision of infrastructure. Options such as a locally led development corporation were highlighted. The option of bidding for monies to investigate these options through the MHCLG Delivery and Innovation Fund was also highlighted.

In response to the report Members resolved to acknowledge the importance of having effective delivery vehicles in place at the earliest possible stage and agreed the principle of submitting a bid to the MHCLG Delivery and Innovation Fund to explore the creation of a locally led development corporation. Members also recommended that cabinet support the garden communities’ status. This was subsequently endorsed by Cabinet at their meeting on the 27th November 2019. It should be noted that EDDC remains part of the garden communities programme as part of the joint bid albeit in the absence of a commitment to a proposal within East Devon support through the programme has been directed to the other authorities.

At Strategic Planning Committee on the 23rd July 2020 Members considered a draft policies and site options consultation that had been prepared for the GESP. This can be found at: [Agenda item - Greater Exeter Strategic Plan: draft policies and site options consultation - East Devon](#). This

document highlighted opportunities for 3 potential new communities within the west of East Devon, these were referred to as Higher Greendale, Hillbarton and Oil Mill Lane. Each of these options was summarised in the proposed consultation materials in terms of their opportunities, sensitivities and the potential requirements that would be needed to make growth in these locations acceptable in planning terms. Sat behind this document was a detailed sustainability appraisal (SA) assessing each of these options and the emerging evidence base for the GESP which included a Transport Strategy and housing and employment needs assessments.

Although Members ultimately resolved to withdraw from GESP a clear initial evidence base for a new community in the west of East Devon had been established and published at this stage. These documents can be found at www.gesp.org.uk . The options have remained largely unchanged since then with the exception of the Oil Mill Lane option which relates to a smaller area than considered under GESP.

On 15th December 2020 Members at Strategic Planning Committee considered a further report on the issue of garden communities and delivery vehicles which followed on from the October 2019 report. The report can be found at: [7. Garden Communities and Delviery Vehicles 151220.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#). It included details of the findings of the work commissioned at that time on delivery vehicle options that was undertaken by Local Partnerships. The report set out the further work that needed to be undertaken to establish a business case to support the establishment of a locally led development corporation. Members noted that an expression of interest had been submitted to the MHCLG New Development Corporation Competition and recommended to cabinet that a budget of £300k be set aside for work over a 3 year period to progress this work. This budget was subsequently agreed by Cabinet and Council.

On 28th July 2021 Cabinet considered a report entitled “Cranbrook New Community – 10 years in” which can be found at: [Cranbrook Overview - 10 Yrs.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#). Although not directly about establishing a new community and delivery vehicles it sought to highlight key lessons that can be learned from Cranbrook partly with a view to informing work on the new Local Plan and any future new community proposals. As a result that report and in particular section 2.1 covering the main learning points for Cranbrook are considered important to exploring a further new community and need to inform future work.

Current and future work

Much of the above-mentioned work focuses on the opportunity that a new community presents and the potential to ensure the delivery of a high quality development supported by the timely delivery of infrastructure through appropriate delivery vehicles. Alongside this work officers have been considering the options across the whole district for accommodating the growth needs of the district. This work is summarised in the working draft of the Local Plan that Members considered at their December meeting and subsequently. The documents relating to this can be found on the agendas of the December Strategic Planning Committee meeting and subsequent agendas. In many respects this work is equally important in considering proposals for a new community as it demonstrates that there is a lack of good sites to accommodate growth in much of the rest of the district. This reinforces the assumptions that underpinned the 2018 report on the principles for accommodating growth and confirms that some form of large scale development in the western part of the district would be required to meet housing needs. The three options highlighted at that time remain in play with options for the large scale expansion of one or more villages highlighted in the options for meeting the housing shortfall while the opportunity for one or more new communities is also presented.

The work demonstrates that even with a new community proposal accounting for 2,500 homes in the plan period there would still be a shortfall of around 900 homes to be accommodated on sites that have either not yet been identified or that have not scored highly in officer's initial assessment. At Members meeting on the 8th February Members voted in favour of looking at villages below tier 4 for growth, a search for extra sites and to be less restrictive to growth in the AONB's. Officers will now pursue these options, however it is very unlikely that they will yield sufficient additional sites to accommodate the shortfall of housing sites needed to meet the housing need without a new community forming part of the spatial strategy for growth.

In terms of further work involved in developing the evidence base there is significant further work that officers will need to do to consider the 3 options for a new community noting that at present officers have not presented any scoring of these options. The work also needs to consider this option in further detail against alternative scenarios such as higher levels of growth in existing settlements, however officer's initial view is that a new community presents the most sustainable option.

Consultants have now been commissioned to undertake the further work envisaged in the 15th December 2020 Strategic Planning Committee report which dovetails with the work officers are doing on local plan production. This work will help to assess the options for a new community as part of the first phase of the work. The commission is flexible and allows for the work to be terminated after stage 3 below if Members are not minded to pursue one or more of the new community options. In the event that a new community option is pursued then the brief allows for this to be master planned and a business case developer for an appropriate delivery vehicle.

The overall commission envisaged should it run its full course would cover the following key areas:

- 1) Review of options for the choice, form and location of new community proposals – a number of large scale proposals have been promoted through the initial call for sites process. The commission will help to ensure that there is a robust evidence base to inform the selection of development proposals in terms of the ability to secure key outcomes in line with the NPPF considerations.

The options review will need to consider key infrastructure such as:

- transport infrastructure both within and around the site including impacts on the major road network and the ability to promote active travel and a choice of modes of transport
- energy infrastructure and the ability to support zero carbon development
- green infrastructure including the ability to mitigate potential impact on key habitat sites and to provide biodiversity net gain
- community infrastructure, for example to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Connections to key services such as electricity, water, drainage and broadband as well as community and other infrastructure needed to support the development.

A full understanding of what infrastructure is needed and the associated costs will be required to assess the viability and deliverability of each option. The review will also need to consider the parties involved in each option and the governance arrangements and delivery vehicles they propose.

- 2) Vision– to work with Council officers and members to develop a 30 year vision for a new community in the district which sets out the Council's requirements in the form of

a set of criteria against which the options and their proposed delivery vehicles can be assessed.

- 3) Initial Options Appraisal – to use the vision and criteria developed at stage 2 to assess the major development options and make an initial recommendation to be considered alongside a draft Local Plan for consultation.
- 4) Masterplan – Following consultation on the draft Local Plan and consideration of responses to each of the options if a proposed site for allocation is identified then the consultant team will then be expected to undertake a master planning exercise for this site in consultation with key consultees and through a process of community engagement.
- 5) Preferred delivery option/model – this will include all necessary stakeholder engagement to help define the preferred option for the delivery vehicle to bring forward the preferred new community option.
- 6) Business case – to include final modelling of infrastructure costs, indicative viability assessment and long term stewardship and legacy arrangements.

Key outputs from the work to include:

1. Transport Assessment – This will need to consider the impact of each of the proposed new community options on transport infrastructure taking into account other growth planned for within the area including as yet undelivered growth in the adopted Local Plan and Cranbrook Plan as well as that emerging through the production of the new Local Plan. Impacts on all forms of transport will need to be considered including impacts on the county and strategic road network which will need to be considered in consultation with the County Highway Authority and Highways England. The county council have an up to date traffic model of the area which will be made available. This can be used to test options for mitigating the impacts of growth on these networks. The capital and revenue costs of doing so will also need to be understood through this work alongside the alignment with the Exeter Transport Strategy 2020 – 2030.
2. Infrastructure Requirements Report – A detailed report covering all of the infrastructure requirements of the 3 new community options with a breakdown of the costs involved of connecting to key pieces of infrastructure. The report will need to identify where there are key benefits of one option over another as a result of its proximity to key infrastructure connections or where differences in capacity mean that one site is easier/ less costly to connect than another. The infrastructure requirements to be informed by the visioning work.
3. Vision Document – A document produced following workshop sessions with officers, members and partners detailing a high level vision for any new community within the west end of East Devon. The report to include key objectives for the community and a purpose and role for the settlement as well as setting out a criteria so that each of the options can be scored in terms of how well they would deliver against the vision.
4. Initial Options Report – An assessment of each of the 3 new community options against the agreed vision document and the criteria within it taking into account the gathered evidence on infrastructure costs, proposed delivery vehicles, transport implications etc. such that a clear recommendation is made of which option will best deliver on the Council's aspirations. It is expected that this will be published as part of the evidence base in support of the consultation draft plan.

5. Masterplan – it is expected that this will provide a strategic level framework in the first instance that can be used as the basis for public consultation and engagement alongside the publication draft of the Local Plan. As such it provide a spatial interpretation of the vision and a foundation for future place making. It will enable further levels of detail, including design codes, to be commissioned in the future.
6. Business case – this will set out the rational for establishing a particular form of delivery vehicles to ensure that the vision for the new community is realised. It is expected that the five case model will be used to develop the business case. The business case will need to fulfil the requirements of section 3 of the ‘Guidance on the New Towns Act 1981 (Local Authority Oversight) Regulations 2018’ document.

This work is envisaged to progress alongside the work on the Local Plan to ensure that Members have sufficient information and evidence to consider the options and for them to be subject to consultation at the draft plan stage. The intention is then that if an option for a new community is to be progressed that it be developed in terms of a masterplan and business case such that by the time of consultation on a publication draft of the plan these details will help Members and the public to understand exactly what a new community would look like and how it would be delivered.

It is understood that Members are keen to understand the viability of a new community and how successful it would be at delivering infrastructure in a timely fashion, however there is a lot of work that needs to be done first to understand the infrastructure that needs to be provided, developing a vision for the new community and potential delivery vehicles. These factors will all affect the viability of any new community proposal. As a result there is no quick answer to the question of viability and this will inevitably be one of the last outputs from this work.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this report enables Members to better understand the work that has already been undertaken on developing a new community and delivery vehicles to ensure that it is delivered in a way that meets Members aspirations. The evidence base for this work is ongoing and Members are not at this stage being asked to commit to any options for a new community. It is however important for officers work in progressing the Local Plan and the above mentioned commission that Members give officers a steer as to whether a new community forming part of a spatial strategy for growth is something that is supported in-principle based on what is currently known.

Financial implications:

No direct financial implications on which to comment.

Legal implications:

There are no legal comments other than as set out in this information report.