

Report to: Strategic Planning Committee



Date of Meeting: 14th September 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Draft Local Plan 2020-2040 – Consultation Strategy

Report summary:

This report seeks to set out an outline of how it is envisaged to consult on the draft Local Plan in October. The approach has been developed in partnership with the Council's Communications Team and seeks to engage all groups within the community. It is also envisaged to make extensive use of the new Council consultation software – Commonplace and social media channels. It is hoped that this will the consultation to be fully accessible on mobile devices and engage all groups in the community young and old.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Members note the ideas presented in this report and agree that the proposed consultation methods set out in the report form the basis of engagement for the Draft Local Plan Consultation.

Reason for recommendation:

To give the Planning Policy and Communications teams direction on the consultation strategy and to ensure that all interested groups are appropriately engaged in the consultation.

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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;

Link to

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better Homes and Communities for all
 - Greener East Devon
 - A resilient Economy
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Consultation is a two-way process in which people are informed about the options available to them and asked for their opinion on what is being considered. We want to ensure that communities in East Devon are aware of and able to comment on the topics which matter to them most.
- 1.2 Last year the council ran a consultation on the Issues and Options concerning the next Local Plan. The overwhelming majority of respondents to our questionnaire were either in the 56-70 or 70+ age groups, and members advocated that more effort should be made to specifically seek the views of younger residents in the next consultation, which will be on a draft version of the plan itself and is scheduled to take place in autumn 2022. This report sets out the strategy for this forthcoming consultation, including ideas on how we can better engage with the district's under 50's but particularly the 18-24 age group who do not traditionally engage in planning consultations.
- 1.3 Many of the topics covered in the Local Plan cover the district's younger residents specifically, including housing needs and the lack of affordable homes – a major cause of both younger people leaving the area and the increase in the average age of an East Devon resident.
- 1.4 The population of East Devon already has an older age profile, with the average age of its residents being 50.7 years (the national average is 40.1 years). The 65+ age range looks set to grow more than any other over the next five years growing from 30.1% of the population in 2017 to 32.5% of the population in 2027. (Source: [Knowing East Devon summary](#)).
- 1.5 With that in mind, it only seems right greater effort is made to hear the views of the younger generation on such important matters as the next Local Plan and to ensure a better balanced range of respondents to the next consultation in terms of age. It is also important that we engage across all groups in the community and ensure that the consultation is fully accessible to all.

2. Social media

- 2.1 The council has a presence on all of the most popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Although used by people of all ages, social media is more commonly favoured by the young. The majority of Facebook and Instagram users are aged between 25 and 34, followed by the 18-24 age group (source: Statista).
- 2.2 By making greater use of social media with targeted posts, themed by area and the issues specifically relevant to that area, we would hope for an improved response from the district's younger residents.
- 2.3 Posts would be made at least twice each week throughout the consultation period, and we would also ask community groups to share these posts with their followers.
- 2.4 It is understood that video content tends to gain the most traction on social media and so it is envisaged to create a series of short videos by town and subject area in order to get out key

messages and headlines and then record whether videos are liked or shared to give an indication of viewers views on the video.

3. Youth Parliament / Devon Youth Council and schools / colleges

- 3.1 A member of the Devon Youth Parliament representing East Devon (jointly with Mid Devon) was newly elected in March, whilst the Devon Youth Council currently has between 15 and 20 members (although I'm unsure of the number of youth councillors based in / representing East Devon). The council has reached out to a youth worker who acts as a liaison with both the county's MYPs and members of the separate Devon Youth Council with the idea of asking the newly elected MYP for East Devon and relevant Devon Youth Councillors for help in engaging the younger generation with the Local Plan, although specific details have not yet been decided upon.
- 3.2 In terms of engaging with the very youngest age demographic, we could offer schools in the district the opportunity to engage through an on-line assembly whereby officers could present some key issues associated with the local plan and seek to obtain some views from the students. A revised 'young person's version' of a consultation questionnaire could be produced for use in the schools / colleges session.

4. Other communication methods

- 4.1 In addition to **social media, engagement with Youth Parliament / Devon Youth Council members** and the potential of **school and college engagement**, other methods of communication have been considered. Traditionally the team would have manned stalls in town halls around the district to enable residents to come in a review the consultation and speak to a Member of staff. This approach has not worked well in recent years with low turnout and it tends to only engage with those that available during the working day who are likely to engage anyway through other means. These sessions are very resource intensive and given the poor turnout it is not intended to pursue this approach for this consultation. It is however envisaged to pursue the follow measures to engage the community in the consultation:

Newsletters	Weekly newsletters published on the EDDC web site and also emailed to all those who asked to be kept informed regarding the Local Plan, along with all town and parish councils and relevant community groups.
Videos	Video content is considered to be key to engagement on social media platforms, however these could also be used as an introduction to the plan and key topic areas on the web-site capturing key issues in an easy to understand way that leads people into the main consultation itself. It is considered that these could include videos for each town setting out for each how much growth is planned, why and where. Other key topics that could be covered would be an overview video of the plan, Climate emergency, Housing for all, Economy and Environment.
Press Releases	Regular press releases would be published and sent to relevant media organisations (i.e. BBC South West / ITV West Country, Archant's Herald & Journal titles, Nub News, etc). After the initial launch of the consultation, these would be localised by

	area and broken down into categories (e.g. ecological, community, housing, S106, employment land, etc)
EDDC Web Site	In addition to newsletters and press releases, web site exclusive articles will also be published throughout the consultation period on specific areas and topics, which will be shared and promoted on the council's social media platforms
Posters, Banners and Billboards	Council property could be utilised for publicity purposes, including posters in public toilets, banners attached to roadside fences or – if budgetary restraints allowed – even on the side of buses
Quick Response (QR) Codes	QR codes could be generated for use on posters, banners and billboard – even the back of car park tickets – so mobile phones can scan the code and users be directed to the relevant EDDC web page(s) without the need for web addresses to be remembered for later use or even be manually entered into the mobile device
Neighbourhood Planning and Town and Parish Council Workshops	We have already been running a series of on-line webinars/workshops with neighbourhood planning groups and town and parish councils and it is envisaged that these would continue. They allow those with particular knowledge and interest in the community who act in some way as a representative of their community to be engaged in more detailed discussion of the issues with officers and express views to inform the work.

5. Key issues to focus on

5.1 Although what is perceived as the most important aspects of the Local Plan may differ between the varying age demographics, people will undoubtedly be most keen to engage on the topics that matter most to them. For example, for the under 40s / younger families, these issues could be:

- Affordable housing;
- Open spaces;
- Play areas;
- Environmental schemes (recycling, going plastic free, etc);
- Community facilities;
- Employment;
- Infrastructure provision.

5.2 Focusing attention on these issues perhaps taking one issue per week during the consultation and focusing posts on social media, press releases etc on that issue for the week would help to draw attention to key issues and ensure that we always have a new and engaging message to communicate throughout the consultation period.

6. Consultation software

- 6.1 The Issues and Options consultation was conducted online using ESRI StoryMaps to present the document for consultation (as a more user-friendly alternative to a standard PDF) and Granicus Firmstep to collect responses submitted online. The Council has now invested in Commonplace as its online citizen engagement platform. This will enable the consultation to be presented in a more engaging and interactive way that works equally well on a desk top as it does on a tablet or smart phone. It will enable consultation material to be viewed and comments made within the same window and enable different ways of seeking views on questions. The software enables questions to be asked in different ways either seeking a score, or a response based on a scale of a smiley face to a grumpy face or ask respondents to rank statements in order of preference etc. All of these measures, it is hoped, will make the consultation more engaging and ensure more and better feedback.
- 6.2 The software will also enable potential site allocations to be shown on a mapping system so that these can be viewed spatially and respondents can also view layers of constraints to inform their comments on each sites. They will also be able to comment on potential site allocations simply by clicking on the site on the map. This should make it easier for respondents to go into the consultation and quickly identify sites that will impact directly on them and comment without having to review the rest of the consultation materials if they don't wish to. It is envisaged that this element of the consultation would be presented as a map per town/settlement to enable easy navigation for users. The maps would then show each of the potential sites with these colour coded using a traffic light system to show the preferred allocation sites, 2nd choice sites and those that have been dismissed as an option at this stage. This will enable users to comment all potential site options but give respondents a clear indication of the Council's preferred sites and strategy at this stage to inform responses.
- 6.3 The software has a lot of data analytics tools as part of the package which will enable quicker and easier analysis of the responses made on the consultation but only if these are made using the software. With this in mind the intention is to manage the consultation such that we will only accept comments made through the consultation software. Aside from this we will keep track of social media posts and track the numbers of likes and shares to gauge interest in the issues raised. We would not however foresee accepting e-mails and letters responding to the consultation. These would be difficult to analyse and may not respond to the questions raised in the consultation. It is considered that the software being used should be suitably easy to use and accessible to all such that there should be no need for responses to be made by other means and so channelling them through the software is seen as reasonable.

Financial implications:

All required expenditure will be incurred from existing budgets therefore there are no financial implications.

Legal implications:

There is no direct comment to be made in relation to this report, the Council's duties in the context of the Public Sector Equality Duty, Equality Act 2010 will need to be considered when the consultation is brought forward.