

Report to: **Strategic Planning Committee**



Date of Meeting: 31 October 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

East Devon Local Plan – A proposed new vision

Report summary:

This report sets out a proposed vision for inclusion in the East Devon Local Plan to replace that which featured in the draft plan. This change was prompted by discussion at Strategic Planning Committee on the 21 July in response to a feedback report on the draft plan consultation. Members requested a workshop session to consider the vision for the plan and this was held on the 31 August. Following that session officers have considered the thoughts of Members from that meeting and the exercises undertaken and produced a revised vision. Through this report Members views are sought on the proposed revised vision.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That Committee endorse the proposed vision as set out in this report and agree to its inclusion in the East Devon Local Plan.
2. That Committee consider whether the new Local Plan should include a vision for each of the towns to act as a focus for the plans approach to each of these locations.

Reason for recommendation:

To replace the vision in the existing draft local plan with a more locally relevant, forward looking and spatially defined vision that is more directly relevant to East Devon and its future.

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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

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Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

The consultation draft local plan from November 2022 and other local plan papers can be viewed at:

[Draft Local Plan Consultation - East Devon](#)

Links to other background documents, if identified, are contained in the body of this report.

Link to Council Plan

Priorities (check which apply)

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

1. The role of a local plan vision

1.1 A local plan vision may be looked upon as setting out an aspirational picture of what an area should look like and how it should function in the future. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises at paragraph 15 that:

*“The planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide **a positive vision for the future of each area**; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.”*

1.2 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) expand on this by saying:

“Plans set out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well designed places.”

And PAS continue by advising:

Developing a vision for the local plan involves looking ahead to what your area will be like in 15-20 years’ time, and may include some or all of the following elements:

- *A direction of travel as to how the plan area will evolve.*
- *The general location of where development will take place and where it will not.*
- *What the nature of development activity should be in key parts of the plan area.*

- *How levels and types of development will be accommodated, both within the short and long term, in specific areas, such as town centres, and in the most sustainable way.*
- *Reference to the wider context of the plan area, introducing the importance of links to and co-operation with neighbouring authorities.*

1.3 The vision can therefore be seen as a scene setting statement that seeks to set out what East Devon is like now but more importantly, under the implementation of local plan policy, what it should be like in the future. The vision should underpin the objectives of the plan, its strategy and its policies and as such will help shape the future and help bring it about.

2. The current draft local plan vision

2.1 The vision in the draft local plan is drawn directly from the current Council Plan (a plan now in the early stages of being superseded by a new plan) and it advises at paragraph 2.3:

“Drawing directly from the Council Plan the local plan vision is:

To make a positive difference to residents’ lives and our environment in East Devon.

With three priorities:

Better Homes and Communities for all with a priority on the importance of good quality, affordable housing suitable in size and location.

A Greener East Devon, which prioritises issues arising from climate change and supports our natural environment.

A Resilient Economy bringing prosperity to the district”

2.2 In consultation feedback the vision was, however, challenged on the basis of matters to include:

- Not being spatial in nature
- Not being specific and clearly about East Devon (it’s been suggested it could apply to anywhere)
- Lacking in ambition
- Failing to consider how East Devon residents see their area, why they value and enjoy it, and wish to live in and visit it
- Being based on a Council Plan that is time limited and which will soon be out of date
- Not taking into account the district’s - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

2.3 It is, therefore, timely to review the draft plan vision and to consider what a new refined and refreshed vision may look like.

3. Member vision workshop

3.1 On the 31 August 2023 there was a half day member visioning workshop where the above themes and matters were discussed, and members were invited to set out their understanding of East Devon right now and their views and aspirations for the district in the future.

3.2 Part of the work on the day involved a SWOT analysis of the district (SWOT = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). This analysis highlighted the following key issues:

Strengths

- Beautiful natural environment including nearly two thirds AONB
- High quality coastline including Jurassic coast world heritage site
- Good transport links to wider country and the world via road, rail and air
- High levels of home ownership
- Reasonably well off being in the 40% least deprived districts nationally
- High average life expectancy
- Low levels of unemployment
- High levels of qualifications among residents
- Strong tourism sector
- Attractive towns and villages with many listed buildings, conservation areas and tourist attractions

Weaknesses

- High levels of out commuting to Exeter and wider area to work, study etc.
- High levels of car ownership and dependency due to rural nature of much of the district and poor public transport for local journeys
- Big disparity between house prices and wages making homes unaffordable to many of working age
- Older age profile impacts on health care, labour market and economic growth
- Some significant pockets of deprivation in Exmouth and Honiton
- Dispersed rural population restricts access to services and facilities
- Poor rural connectivity to broadband
- Coastal communities exposed to coastal change impacts

Opportunities

- Significant opportunities for nature recovery and to join up delivery with BNG, delivery of SANGS etc.
- Improvements to water quality and protected habitats
- Increased home working has reduced commuting and retained spend in local communities
- Protection and enhancement of heritage assets
- Growth in the west end of the district has led to substantial inward investment and prosperity
- Potential to plan positively to meet the needs of residents for specific types of housing
- Opportunities to benefit from proximity to Exeter in terms of further economic growth

Threats

- Lack of available brownfield sites puts pressure on the countryside to accommodate growth needs
- River Axe SAC under threat from phosphate pollution
- Increased likelihood and severity of flooding due to climate change
- Increased risks of coastal erosion due to rising sea levels
- Deterioration of water quality in some water courses and coastal areas
- Increased commercialisation of agriculture posing threats to the natural environment
- Ever increasing pressures on infrastructure
- Limited space to accommodate development threatens the natural environment
- Loss of community facilities due to economic pressures
- Ability to deliver affordable housing that meets the needs of local people

3.3 The visioning work was also augmented by a 'Postcard from the Future' exercise in which the opportunity was presented to participants to set out, in personalised postcard format, a view of what East Devon (or favoured parts) would be like in the future – writing back to the present day. The thoughts of Members through this exercise have helped to inform the proposed revised vision.

4. The proposed new local plan vision

4.1 Drawing on the work of the visioning session, best practice and national guidance, officers have drafted a new vision suggested for inclusion in the local plan to replace and supersede that set out in the draft consultation plan.

4.2 The proposed new vision is set out below. It extends to beyond 2040 and it sets out a locally distinctive and aspirational vision for what we feel East Devon should be like in the future under the local plan.

By 2040 and beyond East Devon will be a diverse, inclusive and thriving place to live and work in and also to visit and enjoy. We will ensure our towns and villages continue to be great places to live as they grow to meet future needs whilst sustaining strong relationships with the adjacent city of Exeter and our other neighbours.

The western side of East Devon will remain a focal point for growth with Cranbrook now well established and thriving and our second new town expanding rapidly to meet the needs of a growing population. Alongside additional housing new high technology green businesses will continue to invest in the western side of the district securing high quality jobs and training. This development will come forward in an outstanding natural setting created through the expanded and expansive Clyst Valley Regional Park.

At our long-established towns and villages there will be a focus on meeting local and affordable housing needs but still recognising that East Devon will be a place that others will

want to move into. New, improved and adapted housing will give choice of tenure and location with adaptable housing supporting local communities.

Our town centres will form a focal point for business, social and community activity serving residents and visitors alike. We will secure well-paid jobs in both traditional and emerging new sectors closing the gap between average earnings and house prices and improving the self containment of our communities by creating more job opportunities close to where people live.

Rural East Devon will retain its outstanding charm and character with modest sensitively planned development to meet the needs of the local communities. Farming and traditional rural activities will still dominate the use of land though with an emphasis on retaining high quality agricultural land where possible and moving towards more environmentally sustainable farming practices as we reach the middle decades of the 21st century.

Across East Devon new development will draw on our outstanding heritage legacy but also will be forward looking to incorporate net zero carbon technologies in new buildings and built spaces. New, expanded and improved physical, social and community facilities and infrastructure will be delivered alongside growth ensuring that people live healthier and happier lives with greater access to services and facilities in a cleaner and greener setting. High quality urban spaces will link in with Green Infrastructure, open space and recreational facilities which will support the health and well-being of our communities.

Our beautiful and diverse countryside, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, world class Jurassic coast, nature reserves and built heritage assets will remain and be enhanced. We will ensure that alongside new development there is greater care of the natural world with biodiversity improvements and a far richer and more nature friendly tapestry of green spaces in the future.

We will continue to play our part in what will now be an increasingly net zero carbon world and at a local level we will be fully decarbonised. Minimising energy consumption and maximising renewable energy generation will be core to our lives whilst communities in East Devon will be adapting to changes brought about by a warming climate.

- 4.3 In setting out a vision we may not achieve everything, in the best way possible, that we aspire to, but we do want to set the bar high.
- 4.4 From this overall vision for East Devon we will look to refine, though not substantively change, the objectives of the draft plan and thereafter selectively review and refine matters of and around plan strategy and plan policies.
- 4.5 At the Member workshop there was a suggestion that the plan should include visions for each of the towns. This is something that is included in the current Local Plan but had not been included in the draft of the new plan. It is thought that when considered alongside the wider vision these may help to explain in brief the intentions of the plan and ensure that together the visions are truly locally specific. Members views are sought on this approach.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implication resulting from the report.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment.

