

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 5 December 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.08 am and ended at 2.35 pm. The meeting was adjourned at 12.02 pm and reconvened at 12:15 pm and 1.06 pm and reconvened at 1.50 pm.

In the absence of the Vice Chair, Councillor Mike Howe, the Committee agreed to Councillor Paul Hayward being Vice Chair for this meeting.

41 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 23 October 2023 were confirmed as a true record.

42 Declarations of interest

Minute 46. New Community Options Appraisal.
Councillor Jessica Bailey, Other Registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor.

Minute 46. New Community Options Appraisal.
Councillor Paula Fernley, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Broadclyst Ward Member and received an email objection.

Minute 47. Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge.
Councillor Jessica Bailey, Other Registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor.

Minute 48. Teignbridge Local Plan -Publication Plan (Regulation 19) addendum consultation.
Councillor Jessica Bailey, Other Registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor.

Minute 49. Employment of agency staff in the Planning Policy Team.
Councillor Jessica Bailey, Other Registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor.

43 Public speaking

Councillor Jerry Bird on behalf of Farringdon Parish Council and Farringdon Residents Association spoke on item 7 expressing his concerns about the impact the new community would have on the village of Farringdon which has centuries of history, rich arable farmland, diverse fauna and flora, small lanes and character properties. He stated that the consultation process was flawed and clunky and had used the phrase 'option 1 our preferred option' throughout the consultation process which was telling people what the council wants. There were three choices in the consultation, but Mr Bird suggested there should have been a fourth choice 'none of the above'.

Farringdon which is protected by its neighbourhood plan is only suitable for low scale development but now due to landowner developer led development Farringdon will be tipped into the melting pot of mass development losing hundreds of acres of arable land and Mr Bird invited Strategic Planning Committee Members to a site visit before making key decisions.

65% of residents in East Devon do not want a new town – this is a clear message and must be respected.

In relation to the development Mr Bird raises a concern that in reality the developers will promise the earth and deliver pluto, something cold and less inspiring which will probably be too expensive for local people who will be forced to move away – where is the logic in that. He also raises concerns about the infrastructure that is stretched beyond capacity and suggests that options 2 and 3 will come into reality in decades to come which is a catastrophe for East Devon.

He urged Members to think before voting and to not vote in favour if Members had any doubt.

The following statement on item 7 was read out on behalf of Nigel Dutt.

Independent of the choice of options to be discussed in item 7, my issue for this relatively new Strategic Planning Committee is this: From the strategic planning point of view are you as a committee happy that a second new town will be placed just a few hundred metres from a similar sized new town, and between it and Exeter, meaning that neither will establish its own identity, but both will inevitably form part of an extended Greater Exeter conurbation? Remember that we are talking here about two new towns each with eventual populations around the size of present day Tiverton and together a population in excess of 35% of Exeter's population today. This seems to be much too significant a decision to simply be driven by a call for sites rather than first taking a strategic view of East Devon and asking where it would be sensible to place a new community of that size, and whether that is still considered by you to be the solution to the housing problem, especially in the light of the ongoing debates at government level.

A further major issue with the site selection process that has resulted in the three options under discussion is that site ownership has been conflated with site development. This removes the opportunity to separate out the choice of developers from the choice of site and, for example, the ability to require the very highest quality eco building standards and to have an open developer selection process where such an approach is mandated. This in turn leads to what many people, including myself, believe is a developer led plan where you are not able to push back on the developers. For example, they have resisted a requirement for high quality building standards by asserting that this will impact the delivery of affordable housing and so far EDDC appears to be simply parroting that particular line. Apart from anything else, it completely undermines your assertion that EDDC is taking the climate emergency seriously. You can require the highest building standards and choose developers who will meet them as Exeter have proved, otherwise you are simply green-washing.

In summary then, my issue is whether as a relatively newly formed committee you have your own strategic view on these issues, or you are simply going with the flow and doing what you're told to do.

In response the Chair advised if Members felt they had insufficient information to let Mr Dutt know.

44 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters or urgency.

45 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential or exempt items.

46 **New Community Options Appraisal**

The Committee considered the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management’s report that sought a preferred approach for a further new community which Members agreed in principle at the meeting on 1 November 2022 and considered three options in the consultation which ran from December to January 2023.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management gave a short presentation to the Committee that provided a history of why a new community was needed and an overview of the three options.

East Devon’s key constraints:

- Just under 60% of the district was in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Honiton, Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth, Seaton, Colyton and Axminster are constrained by AONBs which prevent major development coming forward
- Coastal Preservation Areas
- Clyst Valley Regional Park
- Green Wedges
- Flood Zones 2 & 3
- European Protected Habitats (Exe Estuary and East Devon Pebblebed Heaths)

Opportunities:

- To deliver a more sustainable and low carbon development
- Opportunities on the edge of Exeter to build on growth
- Delivery at scale makes delivery of new infrastructure easier
- Access to road network
- Scope for innovative delivery models to achieve a higher quality place

Following two call for sites in 2017 and 2021 landowners and developers had come forward with potential land for development. All land options were assessed by consultations on their suitability and viability and as a result the following three options had been identified:

Option 1 – Land to the north of A3052 up to the A30 (east of WestPoint and north of Hill Barton Business Park

Option 2 – Similar areas to option 1 but extends south to the east of Crealy to Greendale Business Park

Option 3 – South of the A3052 and east of the A376 at Clyst St George

Objectives:

- Climate resilience, future proofing and net zero carbon
- Biodiversity Net Gain contributions
- Community ownership of land
- Townscape, design including open space
- Relationship to existing settlements
- Flexible master planning
- A truly sustainable self-sufficient settlement
- Sustainable access, transport, utilities and infrastructure

- Connected and integrated transport infrastructure

Members attention was drawn to the Option Appraisal Technical Assessment – Scoring Summary which detailed the scoring for the three options as follows:

- Option 1 – total score 38.3
- Option 2 – total score 31.7
- Option 3 – total score 37.4

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development advised that Option 1 had the best potential as it was the close to East of Exeter for sustainable travel and had the potential delivery route from the A3052 to the A30 and mitigation for wider transport impacts.

Discussions included the following:

- There is a government requirement to build 910 dwellings a year – this would meet the requirement and option 1 is the best viable option although this will not, please everyone.
- Frustration was expressed about the transport infrastructure. Buses are constantly late, and this needs to be improved across all East Devon.
- Clarification was sought on the impact on other areas if the new community was not built. It was advised that towns and villages would need to significantly increase their numbers for development which would have a substantial impact on some as some tough decisions were already being considered.
- There was a suggestion for a park and ride to be provided further out of the area.
- There are lessons to be learnt from Cranbrook as it still does not have a town centre. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management confirmed that EDDC would be more engaged from the beginning and through a delivery vehicle it will be delivered fit for purpose.
- It is essential to have a new town for the infrastructure.
- Support was expressed for option 1.
- Option 3 was unacceptable.
- It was suggested that along with option 1 SWW should provide a sewage treatment works.
- There is a need for a large industrial estate to decrease commuting.
- It was noted that option 1 did have some higher-grade land.
- There is a strong possibility that if option 1 was selected there would be a need to extend to option 2 in 5 years' time.
- Concerns raised about the scoring summary. It was advised that Members would need to consider their own weighting of the scoring of the options appraisal technical assessment as individual opinions will differ.
- Clarification was sought on the low climate resilience figure.
- Delivery of a new town is a better option than increasing development in other towns.
- It was suggested for SANGS around Farringdon to help protect it.
- Transport into Exeter is a major issue and if option 1 is preferred then this will only increase the problem.
- Clarification was sought on how many other authorities have built two new towns so close together. It was advised that Cambridge was in the same position as they have 3 new towns.
- It was suggested that the new town is an easy option and would be developer led. We are being forced to do this because of the government housing numbers.

- The lack of a railway line is a concern. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management reassured Members that DCC Highways and Network Rail were looking at a Transport Strategy.
- It was suggested that a site visit would be beneficial, along with a transport assessment for the full 8,000 homes instead of the 2,500. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that a site visit can be arranged if Members preferred but urged caution about the tight deadline. He also advised that it is not possible to accurately model the impact of the 8,000 homes over the next years in relation to the transport assessment.
- Clarification was sought on why Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) had not been considered for purchasing land. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development advised that to purchase land by a CPO would be a time consuming and costly process and would cause many challenges.
- There is a need to put more emphasis on moving away from travelling by car.

RESOLVED:

That Members agree to option 1 being the council's preferred approach for a further new community and the consultant group be instructed to progress their work in master planning this option, developing a preferred delivery model and business case.

47 **Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge**

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management presented the report which updated the Committee on comments and responses received to the Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge.

The Joint Strategy reflects the ambitions across a range of strategic planning matters across the four local authority planning areas, together with a high-level list of infrastructure matters that have cross-boundary significance.

Members noted that a small number of stake holder consultees had not responded, these included the NHS, National Grid, Western Power and Devon Housing Commission.

Comments about the Joint Strategy document included the following:

- Clarification was sought on the light purple circles on page 6 of the attached appendix. It was confirmed these were major growth areas that included Moss Hayne, Tithe Barn and the new town (approximate location which will be changed in light of previous discussions).
- It was noted that Exeter had the second largest travel to work area in the UK with 37,000 daily commuters.
- Clarification was sought on the major tourism opportunities detailed on page 14 of the appendix. It was advised these were proposals by Mid Devon District Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Joint Strategy (Appendix 1) be approved subject to this being agreed by the partner authorities, with delegated authority given to the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning, to make any amendments arising from the resolution of the other authorities provided these do not materially alter the content of the document.

48 **Teignbridge Local Plan -Publication Plan (Regulation 19) addendum**

consultation

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management briefed Members on the response to Teignbridge District Council's initial Regulation 19 Local Plan Consultation in which East Devon District Council had previously raised concerns about the housing provision in Torbay which would cascade down to Teignbridge and onwards. Members noted that these comments would still stand.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management referred to the amendments in the addendum which related to issues with the Habitat Regulations and the threshold of the delivery of SANGS mitigation and drew Members attention to East Devon District Council's proposed response to Teignbridge District Council.

It was advised that guidance from Natural England was as follows:
'SANGs should aim to supply a choice of routes of around 2.3 – 2.5km in length with both shorter and longer routes of a least 5km as part of the choice, where space permits.'

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that SANGs should be at least 10 hectares in size and he raised a concern that Teignbridge District Council's Local Plan had relatively small housing allocations and was proposing to deliver SANGs on-site which was less than 10 hectares and therefore would not be able to deliver the 2.3 – 2.5km routes.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed response to the Teignbridge Local Plan consultation be endorsed and its submission to Teignbridge District Council be approved.

49

Employment of agency staff in the Planning Policy Team

The report sought agreement to recommend to Cabinet for additional funding to appoint an agency planning officer on an interim basis to work in the Planning Policy Team to support the Local Plan production.

Members noted that the Planning Policy Team had been short staffed for a significant amount of time which could challenge the timetable for the local plan production.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development identified two key options which was to either seek an agency planning officer which would be in place of the permanent vacancy, or to send work out to consultants. Officers' preference was to look for an agency planning officer on an interim basis, to work alongside officers who would be able to pick up on specific and dedicated work required to support the local plan production which would help work to the timetable.

Comments included:

- Why has the permanent vacancy position not been filled? The reason was due to a shortfall of experienced planners and competition with private companies.
- There is a need to look at market supplements and find a way to make the Planning Department more appealing in the long term to help keep existing and future staff.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That funding of £55,000 be committed to appointing an agency planning officer on an interim basis to work in the Planning Policy Team to support the Local Plan production and cover the vacant Planning Officer post in the team.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
J Bailey
K Blakey
O Davey (Chair)
P Fernley
C Fitzgerald
P Hayward
B Ingham
Y Levine
T Olive
H Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
C Brown
J Brown
R Collins
P Faithfull
G Jung

Officers in attendance:

Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Ed Freeman, Assistant Director Planning Strategy and Development Management
Damian Hunter, Planning Solicitor

Councillor apologies:

B Collins
M Hartnell
M Howe
D Ledger

Chairman

Date: