

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 4 June 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.30 am

103 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee meeting held on 30 April 2024 were confirmed as a true record.

104 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

105 Public speaking

Alison Stenning who spoke on behalf of Colyton Parish Council addressed the committee regarding the proposed development and asked Members to respect Colyton's neighbourhood plan by removing Coly_02a and Coly_02b to help protect the natural setting of the town and its conservation area. These sites can be viewed across the Coly Valley and Axe Valley from Musbury which are both in the national landscape and outside the established built up area boundary of the settlement. Residents believe that Colyton does not need additional housing especially as 72 houses were already being built on the old Ceramtec site and the further 49 dwellings proposed would be unsustainable due to existing infrastructure being at capacity.

Colin Pady, a parishioner of Colyton spoke about how the proposed development to the north west of Colyton at Hillhead would impact on the setting of the conservation area and should not be included for development. He urged Members to listen to the residents of Colyton as they do not want any skyline development which could be seen for over 3 miles away to the east. Mr Pady suggested that a more sustainable site could be chosen on land to the south west of Courtenay Drive where the joint landowners are amenable for this land to be released.

106 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

107 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

108 Assessment of potential development sites and plan making update

The report presented to the committee provided details of the process for reviewing the selection of housing allocations sites that would go forward into the Local Plan and sought Members agreement for this work to commence to allow future work to progress.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management referred to Section 2 of the report and sought Members views on the proposed stepped approach. He advised that the member working party, with invitations extending to all relevant ward members that fall within the boundary, would meet over a number of meetings to consider each town area-based report which would then be brought back to the Strategic Planning Committee for approval. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management emphasised that at no point would any decisions be made outside of the Committee but that it would be an opportunity for sites to be discussed and issues debated and shared.

Members noted that an updated timetable would be brought back to Committee at the next meeting to allow discussions from this meeting to take place first.

The Chair emphasised two points to Members. The first being that Members were not to discuss individual site allocations but to focus their attention on the process itself and the second was to bear in mind that an alternative process could be considered by discussing all the housing allocation sites in formal committee rather than the member working party.

Questions and discussions from Members covered:

- Clarification was sought on when the water cycle study will be ready as although it keeps getting promised but keeps getting delayed. It was advised that a date had been set in June but this has been postponed until after the General Election.
- A concern was raised about public perception to the member working party being discussed behind closed doors. The intention was to have discussions with officers and members to understand public concerns about particular sites and to share knowledge to make sure the assessment work is robust before final details are brought back to committee.
- Clarification was sought on the meaning of paragraph 3.1 Section 2. For example 'a big picture' local plan strategy could be referring to constraints in sustainable locations that may need to be considered and how it fits into the wider strategy and in other cases where other better performing sites are not allocated would mean sites in less sustainable locations such as in tier 4 that have fewer constraints but may not been in a sustainable location.
- Clarity is needed to make sure everyone is clear what the roles are for the working party and Strategic Planning Committee. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that notes will be taken at the working party meetings and put in the public domain for transparency.
- A concern was raised that paragraph 5.1 could suggest it could form the policy writing.
- Clarification was sought on the number of meetings needed. It was suggested between 7 – 8 half day meetings but these could be longer and more meetings needed.
- Councillors Ingham and Parr expressed their support for the meetings to be done within the Strategic Planning Committee as it was important to get this right. Some members were not in favour of this suggestion due to work commitments and other members raised concerns that discussing hundreds of sites within the committee would be unworkable.
- Clarification was sought on how many members were on the working party. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised it was 6 Committee Members and the Leader.
- It was suggested to invite at least one town and parish council member to each relevant working party meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work proposal and timetabling as set out in this report be endorsed with the addition to invite one representative from each relevant town and parish council to the working party meeting.

109 **Defining and Justifying Major Development in National Landscapes**

The report sought Members endorsement to the proposed methodology as set out in Section 4 of the topic paper to consider a small number of sites within the National Landscapes to ensure that any proposed allocations within a national landscape are assessed in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Questions and comments received from Members included:

- Reassurance was sought that the same methodology would not be used for the Green Wedges and boundaries methodology. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised he was mindful of the issues from the Green Wedge methodology and suggested that if Members were minded the recommendations could be amended to ‘note’ rather than ‘agree’ until the findings are presented.
- Clarification was sought on what constitutes ‘major development’ as it is not defined in the NPPF. Although a definite answer could not be given as national landscapes were all very different in character it was suggested it related to site specific and was left to councils to interpret each case on its own merits.
- Support was expressed for the methodology but it goes against council policies and opinions of the planning officers. In response it was advised that all sites would need to be robustly considered for the Local Plan to be found sound.
- A query was made about the tilted balance and the housing land supply if by the time this Local Plan was submitted for examination the council was required to consider the five year housing land supply. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that there would be an issue if the current 4.25 housing land supply dropped which would mean the tilted balance would apply but this would not change things in terms of national landscapes.
- Clarification was sought on what the difference would be if a development was classed as ‘major’. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Management advised that fundamentally any major development would need to be justified as exceptional circumstances for allocating housing in the national landscape.
- A concern was raised about the wording in Section 5 bullet point 2 as the wording for the Spatial Strategy appeared to be ‘set in stone’ and did not appear flexible.

Councillor Mike Howe proposed two slightly amended recommendations as follows, seconded by Councillor Bethany Collins.

1. That Strategic Planning Committee note to adopt the approach set out in Section 4 of the topic paper to identify whether any of the allocations in the national landscapes proposed in the local plan constitute ‘major’ development for the purposes of paragraph 183 of the NPPF.
2. That Strategic Planning Committee note to adopt the approach set out in Section 5 of the topic paper to establish whether there are any exceptional circumstances that would justify individual allocations that are ‘major development’ in the public interest.

RESOLVED:

1. That the approach set out in Section 4 of the topic paper to identify whether any of the allocations in the national landscapes proposed in the local plan constitute 'major' development for the purposes of paragraph 183 of the NPPF be noted.
2. That the approach set out in Section 5 of the topic paper to establish whether there are any exceptional circumstances that would justify individual allocations that are 'major development' in the public interest be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
J Bailey
K Blakey
B Collins
O Davey
P Hayward
M Howe (Vice-Chair)
B Ingham
G Jung
D Ledger
Y Levine
T Olive (Chair)
H Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
R Collins
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

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

Councillor apologies:

C Brown
P Fernley

Chairman

Date: