

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 6 January 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.04 am and ended at 12.28 pm

36 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 November 2025 were confirmed as a true record.

37 Declarations of interest

Minute 41. Future of Neighbourhood Planning Support.
Councillor Brian Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Exmouth Town Councillor and had been involved with the development of Exmouth's Neighbourhood Plan.

Minute 41. Future of Neighbourhood Planning Support.
Councillor Peter Faithfull, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Ottery St Mary Town Councillor.

38 Public speaking

Thomas Shillitoe addressed the Committee concerning the Regulation 19 Local Plan, stating that in his view the Plan was neither sound nor legally compliant and runs the risk that substantial changes are needed at examination. He referred to a breach of the Regulations, noting that the consultation had been substantially altered since its publication. Mr Shillitoe spoke about Exmo_20 and urged the Committee to take immediate steps to remove the development at the upper section and proposed that the surplus allocation of 563 housing allocations be utilised instead. He expressed concern regarding what he perceived as the Committee's compliant approach and urged Members to ensure that the opportunity presented by the 563 surplus housing allocations was not wasted.

John Hamill expressed serious concerns regarding decisions made by Committee which he believed compromised the credibility, legality and soundness of the Local Plan. He cited key issues including the absence of a complete air quality mitigation strategy, inconsistencies within the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and flaws in the site selection methodology. Mr Hamill emphasised that the Regulation 19 stage should be evidence-led, justified and consistent; however, instead his view is that the evidence was being shaped to fit predetermined outcomes describing this as outcome-driven planning. He highlighted several fundamental problems including procedural failures, questions over the soundness of the Plan, a lack of public trust and significant legal risks. He urged the Committee to acknowledge these failings and to have the courage to change these before the Inspector rejects the Local Plan.

Nigel Humphrey addressed the Committee regarding public engagement in the Regulation 19 process and raised three key points:

1. Following the initial consultation, the public were advised that individual responses to questions would not be provided; however the sustainability appraisal report

included over 30 pages of the Council's responses to all comments received. He stated that the public should be informed of these responses.

2. Specific questions raised at the previous meeting were not adequately answered. An email reiterating these questions, along with an additional query, was sent to the Chair in early December and copied to all Committee Members. To date no response has been received.
3. He questioned what steps the Council would take to engage with the public and encourage comments on the proposed new community. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services had advised that 1,100 comments on site Exmo_20 was not unusual for a large development; however only four comments have been received regarding the new community, which is expected to comprise over 10,000 dwellings.

Mr Humphrey advised the Committee that the Council must demonstrate a genuine and comprehensive commitment to engaging with and listening to the public. He added that providing responses to his questions would be appreciated.

Stuart Lees, referred to the Regulation 19 consultation and expressed concern about the pressure on already overstretched local infrastructure, as well as findings from the Water Cycle Study which identified significant issues with water treatment and pollution in the River Otter. He asked what measures would be taken to address these problems, requested local face-to-face meetings, and sought clarification on whether planning would be paused until South West Water resolve the water-related issues.

Francis Whiteley spoke in relation to Minute 43 – Proposed response to consultation on the evolving Local Plan for Torbay and questioned East Devon District Council's responses which questioned the validity of Torbay's current standard method numbers. He suggested that housing numbers should be discounted to take account of the National Landscape. He noted that the Torbay Plan proposes to provide for a lower figure because of the National Landscape there and yet East Devon has not taken this approach. He noted that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) standard method requires the minimum number of houses whereas he believed East Devon were seeking to maximise housing numbers. He said that this would have knock on impacts for housing delivery across the wider area.

Councillor Roy Collins spoke on the balance between tree planting and food production. He noted that while the UK has planted many trees to support environmental goals, this has coincided with a reduction in domestic food production, leading to increased imports from countries where forests are being cleared to grow food. He stated that this approach is counterproductive for global climate change, as producing food locally would cause far less environmental harm than clearing vast areas of rainforests to meet demand. Councillor Collins highlighted concerns regarding East Devon and urged the Committee to reconsider the use of sites containing agricultural land. He emphasised that converting these areas into housing or employment sites would diminish future food production capacity, which is essential for generations to come.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services responded, noting:

- All feedback on the Local Plan must be submitted through the ongoing consultation process.
- Further communications will be issued as there are still several weeks remaining, reminding the Committee that this consultation addresses comments raised in previous rounds.

- Anyone who previously commented on the consultation has been contacted regarding the current consultation.
- Face-to-face meetings were held during the Regulation 18 consultation in 202, however, as the Local Plan is now at a later stage, such meetings are not considered appropriate.
- The Local Plan includes policies preventing the delivery of new homes unless there is sufficient waster water capacity to accommodatethe additional flows.
- He disagreed with Mr Whiteley's comments on National Landscape and housing figures, explaining that while Torbay proposes to not meet its housing need, East Devon's Plan does meet its requirement – even though 58% of the district is designated National Landscape.

39 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency to discuss.

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

There were no confidential or exempt items to discuss.

41 **Future of Neighbourhood Planning Support**

The Assistant Director - Strategic Planning and Development Services presented the report to the Committee outlining the future of neighbourhood planning support. He noted that East Devon has historically been proactive in providing officer support to local communities.

However, the Government's decision to withdraw the national support programme, which previously offered grants of up to £10,000 coincides with the anticipated depletion of the Council's own neighbourhood planning reserve by 2026/27. This creates a significant challenge in meeting East Devon's statutory duty to provide advice, guidance and support for neighbourhood planning.

The Assistant Director - Strategic Planning and Development Services emphasised the importance of continuing support, while recognising limited resources and proposed prioritising officer time on reviewing and updating of existing neighbourhood plans alongside sharing resources, digital tools and providing training. The Committee were advised that, to help 're-launch' neighbouring planning, officers will hold a half-day in-person event in the first quarter of 2026.

The Assistant Director - Strategic Planning and Development Services invited the Committee's views on how best to ensure neighbourhood planning remains viable and delivers robust plans.

Questions from the Committee included:

- Further clarification was sought on the effectiveness of sharing resources and whether officer support would be available for revising plans. The Committee noted that support and guidance would be provided by the dedicated Neighbourhood Planning Officer and parishes would continue to be invited to attend webinars and in-person events to help understand what would be required.
- Guidance was requested on what budget parishes should allocate for plan updates, noting that smaller parishes may face challenges in setting aside

sufficient funds. The Assistant Director - Strategic Planning and Development Services advised contacting the Neighbourhood Planning Officer as costs depend on the size of the community and its objectives.

- There is a need to inform parish councils about the challenges facing the district council and, with the potential for a Devon-wide Local Plan in the future, the importance of having neighbourhood plans is now greater.
- It was suggested that the first recommendation was too weak and should be reconsidered.

Committee debate included:

- The importance of neighbourhood plans and continued funding for parish councils was highlighted, noting the high costs for smaller rural communities. While acknowledging East Devon District Council's budget constraints, it was suggested that some financial support should be provided.
- It was suggested that the government may be seeking to reduce local influence on planning policy, indicating a broader move toward centralisation.
- Support was expressed for the recommendations as written as it was suggested that costs for neighbourhood plans could be passed on to council tax payers.
- Support was expressed for neighbourhood plans as it brings people together about local issues.
- It was noted that councillors need more information on the role and benefits of neighbourhood plans, and how they can use their position to promote them.
- Support was expressed for providing a dedicated funding envelope to cover costs associated with neighbourhood plans.
- It was suggested that a report at the next meeting on how many parishes require funding would help assess cost implications. The Chair clarified that, due to time constraints, the report would need to go to Cabinet or Overview and Scrutiny instead.
- It was noted that, when funding neighbourhood plans, consideration should be given to the fact that town and parish councils can set their own precepts without limit.
- Support was expressed to providing funding to town and parish councils, but it was noted they should cover the majority of the cost themselves as it will benefit them directly.

Councillor Jess Bailey proposed a further two recommendations, seconded by Councillor Brian Bailey.

To read as follows:

4. The Committee recommends the development of a grant scheme to provide financial support for the development of neighbourhood plans and requests a report back to the next Strategic Planning Committee.
5. The Committee recommends to the Cabinet that an appropriate budgetary provision is made for the new grant scheme for the financial year 2026/27.

The Committee were supportive of the additional recommendations.

RESOLVED:

1. That the changed context for neighbourhood planning in the light of the Government Spending Review with the cessation of access to grants and funding technical support for communities be noted and that the Chair be recommended to write to MHCLG to formally register this Council's disappointment with the

decision and urge reconsideration and/or consultation on an alternative support arrangement.

2. That the 2026/27 budget be noted and prepared on the basis of a continuation of current neighbourhood planning support offered to communities in East Devon despite this impacting on the general fund.
3. To receive an annual report on neighbourhood planning activity for information, noting that reports for decision need to continue to be taken to Cabinet until such time as the constitution is reviewed.
4. The development of a grant scheme to provide financial support for the development of neighbourhood plans be recommended and a report be taken back to Strategic Planning Committee.
5. The Committee recommends to the Cabinet that an appropriate budgetary provision is made for the new grant scheme for the financial year 2026/27.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

The Committee recommends to the Cabinet that an appropriate budgetary provision is made for the new grant scheme for the financial year 2026/27.

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Employment Land Review 2024-25

The report provided an annual summary of employment land provision in East Devon to the year ending 31 March 2025 seeing 16 employment developments completed amounting to 5.76 hectares based on the assessment of the following use classes:

- B2: General Industrial
- B8: Storage and Distribution
- E(g) i) Offices to carry out operation and administrative functions
 - ii) Research and development of products and processes
 - iii) Industrial processes
- Sui Generis or other uses that occupy employment sites that do not fall into B/E(g) category, but which are similar in nature.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services highlighted the following specific issues in the East Devon Employment Land Review report:

- Page 157 – Outline planning application (22/2781/MOUT) for 130 dwellings to the east of Harepath Road, Seaton.
Clarification: Approved in principle, subject to a Section 106 Agreement
- The employment land at Newcourt Barton on Clyst Road, Clyst St Mary is not included in the report and should be added to sites where additional work is required in Appendix 1F.

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services advised that, in light of these and any further issues that may arise, an additional recommendation should be included to grant him delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair, to make the necessary amendments to Appendix 1F.

Questions raised by Committee Members included:

- Clarification was sought on whether farm diversification was addressed in the report. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services acknowledged these types of diversification are difficult to identify and would require councillors' local knowledge.
- A question was raised about the weight of the villages plan compared to the new Local Plan; The Committee noted that the villages plan will be phased out as the Local Plan is phased in.

- Concerns were expressed about the report's accuracy, noting missing information.
- It was noted that Rockbeare Quarry and Blackhill Quarry were not included in the list.

RESOLVED:

1. The information set out in the Employment Land Review 2024/25 be noted and published on the Council's website.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services in consultation with the Chair to add additional sites and issues to appendix 1F of the report.

43 **Proposed response to consultation on the evolving Local Plan for Torbay**

The Committee considered a report seeking endorsement of the Council's proposed responses to Torbay Council's Regulation 18 draft consultation. Members were advised that, although Torbay is not a neighbouring authority, its Local Plan refers to a duty of co-operation from wider Devon authorities as the Plan does not meet its housing need. It was therefore considered important for this Council to respond, highlighting concerns about the inappropriateness of accommodating any of Torbay's unmet housing need within East Devon, given the geographical separation between the two areas.

Questions and comments raised by Committee Members included:

- Whether any other authorities that neighbour Torbay Council have responded in a similar manner. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services was unable to confirm but advised that this Council was not alone in its concerns and noted Teignbridge District Council, a neighbouring council was in its final stages of adopting its Plan.
- Whether Torbay Council had undertaken a call for sites. It was understood that a call for sites had been carried out, but insufficient sites were identified.
- A suggestion that the recommendation lacked sufficient robustness.
- While sympathy was expressed for Torbay Council's significant challenges in meeting its housing need, support was given for the proposed responses, noting that this Council also faces its own housing pressures.

RESOLVED:

That the Council respond to the Torbay Council Local Plan consultation (using the text set out in the committee report) to ensure that the views and concerns of East Devon District Council around their policy position in respect of housing provision are appropriately heard and taken into account.

44 **Infrastructure Funding Statement**

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services presented a report seeking approval for the publication and submission to government of the 2024/25 Annual Structure Funding Statement setting out monies received from Community Infrastructure Levies and Section 106 agreements during the year.

Key points highlighted included:

- 8 S106 agreements were signed securing £4.96m in financial contributions and 415 affordable dwellings.
- A total of £1.622m was collected in financial contributions.

- £734,000 was spent on community infrastructure including Exmouth Rugby Club and Pinhoe Surgery.

In response to Members noting that some parishes were missing from the Neighbourhood CIL summary, the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services requested that delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair, to amend the list accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of this report and the requirements to provide an Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement be noted.
2. That the publication and submission to government of the 2024/25 Annual Funding Statement based on the information detailed in the report be approved and delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services, in consultation with the Chair to amend the Neighbourhood CIL summary list.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

J Bailey
K Blakey
O Davey
P Faithfull
C Fitzgerald
M Howe (Vice-Chair)
B Ingham
G Jung
T Olive (Chair)
H Parr
B Bailey

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

A Bailey
R Collins

Officers in attendance:

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

Councillor apologies:

P Fernley
Y Levine

Chairman

Date: