

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 5 May 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.15 pm.

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Todd Olive, the Vice Chair, Councillor Mike Howe chaired the meeting and the Committee agreed to Councillor Jess Bailey being Vice Chair for this meeting.

55 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were deferred to allow consideration of the corrected statement from public speaker Thomas Shillitoe.

56 Declarations of interest

60. East Devon Local Plan – Progress Update Report.

In accordance with the Code of Good Practice for Councillors and Officers dealing with planning matters as set out in the Constitution, Councillors Brian Bailey, Charlotte FitzGerald, Geoff Jung and Dan Ledger, advised lobbying in relation to Exmo_20.

60. East Devon Local Plan - Progress Update Report.

Councillor Jessica Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Otter Valley Division.

60. East Devon Local Plan - Progress Update Report.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Axminster Division.

61. Heritage Strategy 2024-2042.

Councillor Jessica Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Otter Valley Division.

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Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Axminster Division.

62. Self-Build and Custom House-Building Update and Monitoring Report for 2024 - 2025.

Councillor Jessica Bailey, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Otter Valley Division.

62. Self-Build and Custom House-Building Update and Monitoring Report for 2024 - 2025.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Devon County Councillor - Axminster Division.

57 Public speaking

Nigel Humphrey addressed the Committee in relation to the draft Local Plan, reminding Members that, despite over 60 meetings and public discussions, the inconsistencies

surrounding site allocation Exmo_20, remained unresolved. In particular, he highlighted the ongoing issue of the proposed restriction on development within 400 metres of the Pebblebed Heaths

He stated that residents are now being advised to raise their concerns at the Planning Inspector's hearing, and that this would be followed by further representations being required at the planning application stage. Mr Humphrey also referred to a Freedom of Information request which revealed that Devon County Council had provided East Devon District Council with forecasts of vehicle flows on roads around the Pebblebed Heaths. These forecasts indicated a daily increase of over 2,500 vehicles on the B3179, and he suggested the majority of the increase was attributed to Exmo_20, based on the assumption that the primary access would be from this road. Mr Humphrey urged the Committee to reconsider its decision to include Exmo_20 in the draft Local Plan.

Nicola Wright addressed the Committee regarding the proposed development at Hayle Farm, which is accessed via the busy A35 trunk road and is located close to the listed Copper Castle and toll gates. She raised concerns that the development would have a harmful environmental impact, permanently damaging a valued landscape.

Ms Wright explained that the site lies on a steep slope, with a stream below flowing into the River Otter, which she stated has dangerously high bacteria levels. She noted that sections of the river have been classified by the Environment Agency as having poor ecological status, with elevated phosphate levels. She also referred to an article in the *Herald Express* reporting that councillors had unanimously blocked new housing developments until sewage concerns were resolved and the capacity of existing infrastructure had been assessed.

Ms Wright urged the Council to give careful consideration to any development on this site and the potential impact on Honiton, its residents, and its wildlife.

John Hamill addressed the Committee regarding the extended timeframe for completion of the draft Local Plan, which he described as both an opportunity and a risk. He noted that while it allowed additional time to finalise the essential supporting documents, he warned that the delay could encourage opportunistic development, referring to reports of residents near the Exmo_20 site being approached by a developer.

Mr Hamill urged the Committee to comply with the Gunning principles, which set the legal standards for fair and lawful public consultation, particularly the requirement that consultation responses be given conscientious consideration before decisions are made. He highlighted that nearly 2,800 comments were submitted in relation to Exmo_20, raising significant legal, environmental, and deliverability concerns, but stated these had been reduced by AI into generic bullet points.

He further referred to the 8 key pieces of outstanding work, including fundamental assessments, and emphasised that these must be completed and properly consulted on. Mr Hamill concluded by urging the Committee to insist on a third consultation in order to meet legal obligations and to act in the interests of residents, the environment, and future generations.

Philip Parsons addressed the Committee regarding the draft Local Plan and highlighted a legal change made in December 2023 to Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which places a duty on public authorities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of National Landscapes which he argued must be demonstrably met and open to scrutiny.

He raised serious concerns about proposed housing allocation at Sidm_34a/Sidm_34b (now Sidm_34) which lies wholly within the National Landscape. He noted that the Council had previously unanimously rejected Sidm_34b due to the harm it would cause on the landscape, but subsequently expanded the site at the developer's request, on the basis that a larger, less dense scheme would reduce visual impact.

Mr Parsons argued that this approach contradicted the Council's own policies and that no exceptional circumstances had been demonstrated to justify major development within a nationally protected landscape. He further stated that there is now an opportunity to correct this error by removing Sidm_34 concluding that doing so would support legal compliance with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and better align with the East Devon National Landscape Management Plan.

Thomas Shillitoe referred to the meeting held on 3 March and thanked the Monitoring Officer for acknowledging errors relating to the deletion of parts of the YouTube recording. He expressed concern that responses from two Regulation 19 consultations continued to be disregarded, contrary to the Planning Inspector's guidance and stated that the Council should be undertaking a rigorous assessment of the plan to ensure it is both sound and legally compliant.

He drew attention to the absence of an agreed air quality mitigation strategy, arguing that mitigation could not be lawfully completed until all required assessments had been completed. He also urged the Council to reconsider the proposed housing numbers, highlighting recent significant reductions in standard method calculations and the increasing level of housing headroom, which he stated indicated that the Council were allocating more land than necessary.

Finally, he questioned whether the Council was fulfilling its duties as the competent authority under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017, highlighting site Exmo_20 as an example which he said undermines the viability of the plan. He concluded by calling on councillors to remove such sites in order to improve the soundness and deliverability of the Local Plan.

Margaret Evans spoke in relation to Honi_18 which adjoins the National Landscape with open views towards Dumpdon Hill. She stated that the late site allocation proposal was introduced at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 29 October 2025 which in her opinion limited the opportunity for proper scrutiny and resulted in its inclusion in the draft Local Plan which she considered an inconsistent decision-making approach.

Mrs Evans also referred to the Water Cycle Study and how the sewage treatment capacity was already under significant strain stating that the study advised against additional housing until capacity and phosphate levels were resolved and sought confirmation that the Council would adhere to these conclusions. She concluded that the proposal was being progressed without sufficient consideration of environmental impacts, infrastructure capacity or landscape harm.

Liz Lees representing Sidford residents raised serious concerns about the Green Wedge Policy and National Landscape Policy that were being overridden to allow development on site allocation Sidm_06a. Approving this development would set a dangerous precedent for further proposals such as Sidm_06b and would cause irreversible harm to the countryside. She referred to the erosion of the physical and visual separation between Sidford and Sidbury, leading to urban sprawl and would also result in harm to local heritage and biodiversity as the site lies close to Sidbury Castle, a scheduled

monument and Brook Farm, a Grade II listed longhouse. For these reasons, she urged the Committee to reconsider these site allocations as they were unsound and legally non-compliant and for them to be removed from the draft Local Plan to protect the unique character of this area for future generations.

In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services acknowledged the concerns raised in relation to a number of site allocations. He confirmed that these issues had been considered throughout the Local Plan process via meetings, consultations and published feedback reports. However, he advised that at this stage of the process any objections must be addressed through the examination, as the Plan cannot be materially amended without undertaking a further consultation exercise. He also advised that officers were using the extended timeframe to complete the remaining evidence gathering and assessment work as detailed in the report.

In response to the questions raised, the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services provided the following advice:

Habitat Regulations Assessment – Work is ongoing with the Council’s consultants to resolve outstanding issues and ensure the Local Plan is legally compliant. At this stage, there is no intention to undertake further public consultations as part of the Plan process.

National Landscapes – Speakers were invited to refer to the topic paper available on the Council’s website entitled ‘Major Developments in National Landscapes’.

Honi_18 – In relation to concerns regarding sewage capacity, it was advised that the Plan includes measures to prevent development coming forward in areas with limited sewage infrastructure until sufficient capacity is available. Ongoing discussions are taking place with South West Water to support the delivery of additional capacity where required.

58 **Matters of urgency**

There were none.

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

There were none.

60 **East Devon Local Plan - Progress Update Report**

The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services presented a progress update on the East Devon Local Plan. Members were advised that, although approval for submission to examination had originally been anticipated at this meeting, this could not be achieved to a number of outstanding supporting documents. In light of the transitional arrangements within the current plan-making system, it was therefore proposed that submission of the Plan be deferred until later in the year. Members were further informed that work is continuing with the Council’s consultants to resolve the outstanding issues relating to evidence and assessment documentation.

The Committee noted that the report included feedback from the second stage of the Regulation 19 consultation. Paragraph 3 provided summaries of the key findings, which largely reflected comments received at earlier stages of the consultation.

The Committee also noted a number of minor amendments required to the feedback report, including the correction of typographical errors, an amendment to the AI declaration on page 11 to reflect the correct consultation period of February to April 2026, and a correction to the appendix header, which incorrectly referred to Stage 1 Consultation rather than Stage 2. These updates will be made prior to publication on the Council's website.

In response to a comment made by a public speaker, the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services clarified, for the public record, that while AI had been used to assist in summarising consultation responses, all responses had been read and considered by officers in full.

On-going evidence and assessment work included:

- Transport work around West End and Marlcombe
- Marlcombe viability testing
- Playing pitch and outdoor sports strategy
- Air quality impact at the Pebblebed Heaths
- River Axe nutrient mitigation strategy
- Water Cycle Study
- Habitat Regulations Assessment

Questions and points raised included:

- It was suggested that the Plan would be likely to exclude local people due to the unaffordability of housing in East Devon.
- Non-Committee Member Councillor Roy Collins questioned the democratic progress relating to site allocation Honi_18 expressing concern that the public and town council had not been given an adequate opportunity to fully engage in consultation and consideration of the allocation.
- A Member requested that consideration be given to returning to a monthly meeting cycle suggesting that more frequent meetings with more manageable agendas would improve oversight and help members better track progress.
- Could officers advise when the viability work will be available in relation to the road network at Marlcombe? In response it was advised that further work is ongoing in relation to Marlcombe and is currently in draft stage, with officers reviewing the consultants work and when finalised will be published on the Council's website. It was confirmed that the main parties involved are the Council, Devon County Council and National Highways with each organisation supported by its own consultant teams.
- A Member responded to earlier comments regarding incomers and housing, noting that properties purchased by newcomers had been willingly sold by existing residents and that land purchased for housing had likewise been sold by landowners. While acknowledging strong local opposition to new housing across many communities, the Member emphasised that the Committee had spent several years working to produce a Local Plan that met national planning requirements and expressed confidence that officers would not bring forward a plan that was not legally compliant. It was requested that where public speakers raise accusations that the Plan is flawed, Members be provided with a clear written summary setting out the issue raised, the Council's response and the associated legal position. This, it was suggested, would provide Members with greater assurance that all statutory requirements had been met as the Plan progresses through each stage. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services sought the Committee's views on whether a frequently asked questions (FAQ) report should be brought to the next meeting.

- It was noted that there has been a significant amount of misinformation in the press and social media regarding housing numbers for East Devon and clarification was requested for the Committee. It was explained that the housing requirement calculated under the standard method changes annually. Members were advised that overall housing number is influenced by changes to the affordability ratio, level of headroom and the need to mitigate risks at examination. It was noted that greater headroom is now being included than originally anticipated to help address potential future increases in housing need. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services offered to bring forward a further report setting out the housing number calculation, rationale and implications in greater clarity should Members wish.
- Clarification was requested as to whether the Council is required to assist in meeting housing shortfalls in other local authority areas.
- Clarification was sought as to whether the Council is required to continue progressing the Local Plan in light of the proposed unitary reorganisation. It was advised that as the Council did not have a five-year housing land supply and an up-to-date Local Plan there was an acute need to continue regardless of the proposed unitary reorganisation.
- Concerns were raised regarding changes to the classification of individual settlements. It was suggested that many of these concerns may arise from developers being dissatisfied with limitations on increasing housing numbers in certain service villages. Clarification was sought on the reasons for changes to the village classification at each stage of the Plan's development.
- Reference was made to the uncertainty over whether the Council should adhere to national housing targets. Concern was expressed that many new homes would remain unaffordable, with a high proportion expected to be priced above £400,000, and that this did not align with evidence of local housing need.
- Concern was expressed regarding comments from the Environment Agency, which indicated that deficiencies in the Water Cycle Study could affect the soundness of the Plan. Clarification was sought on whether officers were confident that these issues could be resolved. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services acknowledged the concerns and advised that a meeting with the Environment Agency had been arranged to fully understand and seek to resolve the issues raised.
- Reference was made to the representations from NHS Devon Integrated Care Board, which stated that primary care infrastructure requirements were not adequately reflected in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Clarification was requested as to whether this work could be progressed and completed with the available timeframe. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services advised that he was trying to set up a meeting with healthcare providers to address these concerns.
- Reference was made to the policy wording for accessible and adaptable housing for older people and concern was expressed as to whether it was sufficiently robust to withstand challenges from developers citing commercial viability as a reason for not delivering such provision.
- It was noted that the affordability ratio had been reduced from 9.88 in the previous year to 9.52. Clarification was sought on this impact. The Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services confirmed that it would have a relatively small impact and highlighted such changes could be reversed in future years, making it risky to rely on short-term reductions when determining site allocations.
- Reference was made to the significant increase in vehicle movements associated with Exmo_20, particularly traffic passing through the Pebblebed Heaths.

Concern was expressed as to whether the allocation remained acceptable if air quality standards could not be met. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services advised that a large number of allocations within the Plan have implications for air quality and that officers are therefore considering the cumulative impacts of the overall strategy. Work is ongoing to explore potential mitigation measures, and it was confirmed that, following a forthcoming meeting with the consultant team, a further update report would be brought to Committee as the matter progresses.

Councillor Geoff Jung proposed the two recommendations, together with an additional recommendation that officers bring forward a frequently asked questions (FAQ) report to the next meeting. It was proposed that the FAQ cover wider issues frequently raised, including legal compliance with the Habitat Regulations Assessment, housing numbers, the Water Cycle Study and investments by South West Water. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Paula Fernley.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report to specifically include the intent to bring a further report to this Committee, later in 2026, recommending the submission of the Plan for Examination be noted.
2. That the consultation feedback report on the second stage of Regulation 19 consultation be noted.
3. That a frequently asked questions (FAQ) report be brought to the next meeting covering wider issues frequently raised, including legal compliance with the Habitat Regulations Assessment, housing numbers, the Water Cycle Study and investments by South West Water.

61 **Heritage Strategy 2024-2042**

The Committee received a report on the consultation feedback on the Heritage Strategy undertaken between 28 November 2025 and 26 January 2026, noting that the amendments arising from the consultation were set out in Appendix A with a tracked-changes version included at Appendix B.

The updates included minor factual and grammatical corrections, revised case studies and data, and additional clarity on heritage-related organisations, legislation and guidance. It was noted that the Strategy provides a comprehensive overview of East Devon's heritage, identifying key issues and opportunities, and supports the heritage policies of the emerging Local Plan.

Comments included:

- Portfolio Holder Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism, Councillor Nick Hookway, expressed strong support for the Heritage Strategy, with particular emphasis on the sections relating to the World Heritage Site. He highlighted that the site is a significant attraction that has historically been under-promoted and stressed the importance of recognising the site's vulnerability to climate change and coastal erosion. He emphasised the important role the Strategy plays in protecting the World Heritage Site, providing reassurance to the public, and local businesses and urged the Committee to support the recommendations.
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the limited reference to agricultural heritage within the Strategy.
- It was noted that the Norman Lockyear Observatory was not recognised as a heritage asset.

- Some Members commented positively on the report, noting it was both helpful and informative.
- It was highlighted that there is often limited understanding among owners and tradespeople about the legal responsibilities associated with listed buildings. Concern was expressed that unauthorised works can cause irreversible harm and asked what further steps the Council could take to better educate prospective purchasers and owners of listed buildings about their duties and obligations. In response the Chair commented that solicitors should be responsible for explaining the obligations at the point of purchase but acknowledged in practice this may not be sufficiently communicated and suggested that engaging with conveyancing solicitors could be an effective way to improve understanding and education among prospective purchasers of listed buildings.
- A Member requested that Axminster be included in the list of towns in East Devon that have a designated Conservation Area.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updated second Heritage Strategy (2024 – 2042) be adopted in support of the Council's duty towards the historic environment.
2. The Committee noted that the Heritage Strategy supports the Local Plan as evidence for policies.
3. That it be noted the Strategy should be taken into account as a guide for our Cultural, Tourism and Planning functions, amongst others.

62

Self-Build and Custom House-Building Update and Monitoring Report for 2024 - 2025

The Committee noted that the Custom and Self-Build (CSB) monitoring figures were last considered by the Strategic Planning Committee in February 2025, at which time officers outlined a revised methodology for counting CSB plots following legislative changes introduced in early 2024. Under the new approach, only plots with clear evidence of custom or self-build delivery are counted.

The latest monitoring shows that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations to provide sufficient CSB plots to match demand on the register. A total of 18 plots were delivered in 2024–25, an increase from 15 plots in 2023–24. However, this modest increase remains consistent with a longer-term trend of lower CSB delivery. It was noted that, in light of strong national policy support for custom and self-build housing, further action may be required to increase the supply of CSB opportunities.

A question was raised as to whether the existence of the register was widely known to the public. In response the Assistant Director – Planning Strategy and Development Services advised that all local authorities in the country are required to maintain a self-build register and that anyone researching self-build opportunities would therefore expect such a register to be in place. A simple google search will find the register on the Council's website.

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft monitoring report for use in planning decisions (both planning policy and development management) be endorsed and its publication be agreed on the Council's website.
2. The Committee noted that the latest monitoring period (31/10/24 – 30/10/25) 8 individuals were added to the self-build register (6 to part 1 and 2 to part 2)

generating a need to permission 6 plots suitable for self-build between 31/10/25 – 30/10/28.

3. The Committee noted that the demand for self-build plots indicated on the register should be taken into account in our planning, housing, regeneration and estate functions.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
J Bailey
K Blakey
P Faithfull
P Fernley
C Fitzgerald
P Hayward
M Howe (Vice-Chair)
G Jung
D Ledger
Y Levine
H Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

A Bailey
R Collins
N Hookway

Officers in attendance:

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

Councillor apologies:

O Davey
B Ingham
T Olive

Chairman

Date: