

Exmouth Neighbourhood Plan

Comments from Devon County Council Historic Environment Team

The HET have concerns that the Neighbourhood plan omits mention of the Historic Environment. There are just under nine hundred heritage assets within the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan, including Scheduled monuments and listed buildings which have statutory protection.

The Neighbourhood Plan should be an opportunity to emphasis Exmouth's Historic Environment, its buildings, archaeological sites, landscapes and streetscapes. Making the most of your historic environment - protecting and enhancing it for everyone's enjoyment, making it more accessible for the social, economic and health benefits this can bring - is therefore an important part of planning for the neighbourhood.

Although there is a section on the Built Environment, it makes no reference to the early history of Exmouth. It is the history and heritage of Exmouth that has shaped the town and parish of today.

The plan lists a number of prominent buildings but makes no mention of the fact that there are just over 130 designated heritage assets within the parish. These include both buildings and structures such as walls and lamp posts. Most are Grade II listed but there are also a number of Grade II* and Grade I listed buildings.

The landscape surrounding Exmouth also contains visible evidence of human activity and land use stretching back thousands of years, from Prehistoric burial mounds; the barrows at Big Wood are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, to patterns of fields created in the Middle Ages and farm, domestic and civic buildings of great historical and architectural interest. Some heritage sites will be well known and valued locally and others less well known. Alongside the natural environment, the historic environment forms the backdrop to our lives. Not always noticed day to day, but sadly missed when it is gone or insensitively changed.

This historic environment may be a material consideration in deciding many of the planning applications submitted here. The National Planning Policy Framework (Section 185) says that all local plans should make the most of 'heritage assets' (archaeological sites, historic buildings, landscapes) by setting out:

..... a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats.

And that this strategy should take into account:

- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- *the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;*
- *the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and*
- *opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.*

The production of the Neighbourhood Plan is an ideal opportunity to determine what parts of the Historic Environment are important to the community and how they are best managed. The Neighbourhood Plan should consider how important these assets are to your community, to Devon or even nationally or internationally. Should the site or building be protected totally from development? Could it usefully be reused and incorporated into a development? Or is it not that important? What archaeological or historic areas and buildings could be used as community facilities or public open space? How can historic sites in the area be made more accessible to the community or linked together by existing or new public rights of way? How can historic sites, nature conservation and other local issues, such as highways and flood management, work together to make a better quality environment all round?

In order to achieve this, the County Historic Environment Team would advise that the Local Plan should be informed by advice and information from a number of organisations, including the Devon County Historic Environment Team (see below). The Local Plan may want to include a Local List of the heritage assets that are of the most importance to the community. These can include structures and features as well as buildings such as the waterwheel near the junction of Alexandra Terrace and Beacon Hill and the Second World War Alan Williams Turret on the Esplanade. Guidance on this is available from English Heritage – <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/local/local-designations/> . Some communities are producing local action plans for their historic environment, which can very usefully inform a Plan. Some district councils in Devon have already produced ‘Green Infrastructure’ strategies, which might be of help in making connections to wider networks linking natural and historic sites. A Devon-wide strategy is currently also being produced and will be available on the DCC website when completed.

The Devon County Historic Environment Record (HER) contains a constantly growing record of known heritage assets and is a great resource that can help you prepare your Plan. The HER is based at County Hall and is open to the

public or available on-line. The Devon County Historic Environment Team, as well as your local District or Borough Conservation Officer, can help to identify the presence and significance of the heritage assets that define and characterise your area, as well as any that may be directly affected by future development proposals.

The Devon County Historic Environment Team would be able to provide guidance and information on the heritage of the area subject to this Local Plan. Further information and contact details can be found at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/>.



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