

To whom it may concern,

There was not obviously a place to which it was possible to enter broad comments such as these in the structured boxes which are included in the consultation website, so I opted to write a letter instead.

My comments are primarily in relation to development of spaces in East Devon, housing and otherwise, with a particular focus on those areas which sit outside of the principal centre, main centres and local centres.

As noted in the preamble to the draft document, East Devon is a largely rural area with much of the population living in the less built-up areas. A few of these areas will be considered by the plan to be “service villages” and everything else will be considered the general rural spaces, which are outside of the areas earmarked for development.

While I do not have any objections to the overarching spatial strategy outlined in the draft plan (focusing the planned development on the key areas which have the highest potential, best infrastructure, etc), and at the risk of a broad oversimplification, what the plan says in simple terms is that if someone wants to invest in property or other small forms of development outside of those centres, the starting position from the planners will be to be unsupportive.

I personally, strongly feel that this is a mistake and the reason for this is the socio-economic sustainability of these smaller villages in the area. Many of the villages in the AONBs or similar have populations of less than a hundred, or a few hundred, disproportionately of older people. The villages have few local amenities and are often poorly served by public transport. They are not generally seen as an attractive place for younger people to live or families to make their homes.

The question that I would like to raise is, what does the future hold for these villages in the context of the master plan that is being proposed? These villages are typically historic, beautiful, home to locally significant buildings and are a key part of the charm and attraction of the East Devon countryside which attracts tourism etc. Over time, these dwellings will need to be sold to, or inherited by, the next generation and the villages will continue and thrive – or wither and die. My fear is that the master plan as proposed pushes these villages further in the wrong direction, and you are damning them to failure in the long term – which will come at a cost more than just to the local residents remaining.

Nobody expects nor desires that a notional 100 person village, nestled in the hillside with poor infrastructure and a lack of local amenities, needs to double or treble in size. But there needs to be a balance struck that provides the basis from which younger people will look at these places as viable options in which to live, raise families, and invest their time and money in order to sustain them and the local community structures. With the right thinking and investment, new local shops can become viable, sustainable local tourism (or other small businesses) can be possible – and the community can gently develop over time for the benefit of the local population.

In order to do this, it needs to be possible that someone that may be considering investing money in purchasing a property in these areas can have some comfort that they will be able to subsequently, reasonably develop them further – subject obviously to sensible assumptions relating to the impacts on the neighbours, environment, respecting the character of the local areas etc. The expectations of the way people live today obviously vary hugely from when most of these properties were built. It shouldn't be the case that you can only improve your own home if you live in one of the few “chosen” places in the plan. If

you can't buy a house and improve it when living outside of the development centres, you make that process of attracting new people to the areas much harder.

Moreover, many of these properties come with adjoining land which – if in the hills – is of often poor quality soil and not ideal for farmland. So the land, while in a way an amenity, provides little economic value and simply comes with an overhead to maintain. Allowing people that live in these locations to invest in carefully considered, small businesses is critical – whether that is providing hospitality services such as guest houses / AirBnB, or other options which make the most of the space and natural beauty that is present.

If I understand the overarching policy correctly, development of people's houses or other forms of development on their land (extensions, conversions, additional outbuildings etc) would be very difficult in any of these locations in East Devon. In that case, the balance is fundamentally flawed. Clearly building random single dwellings or clusters of unplanned dwellings in AONBs is not desirable but there is a middle ground that is conspicuously absent in the plan. Many of these places are literally out of sight to the rest of the population and the knock-on effect to other local residents of well-planned development is virtually zero. These villages need to be supported in a way that attracts future generations of younger people and families in order to sustain the local communities. The attractiveness of these local areas of beauty will fade if people don't want to live there.

I imagine that from a planning point of view, comments like these are essentially an irritation and I fully expect them to be completely ignored. It is, after all, the perspective of the people that live in the least economically important areas, with the smallest populations, that take disproportionately high costs to maintain infrastructure etc. But that doesn't mean they should be ignored or treated so badly by the planning approach. By making it so much harder for people in these locations to invest, the strategy compounds the issues that already exists in these areas and you risk creating essentially derelict villages.