

Examination of the East Devon Villages Plan
Village and Town Centres
East Devon District Council Written Statement for
Wednesday 8 November 2017

This paper forms the response of East Devon District Council in respect of questions raised by the Inspector for the above Examination Hearing Session. The Inspectors Questions are reproduced in bold and the response of the Council is set out below each question. All documents referred to are available on the Council's web site and paper copies may be viewed at the Council Offices, Knowle, Sidmouth.

This evidence has been prepared for the Council by:

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Issue 1: Village and Town Centre Vitality

Question 1.1

Is the approach taken in the EDVP to Beer village centre and Colyton town centre justified?

- 1.1.1 Evidence to support the approach taken is included in submission Document VP11 'Evaluation of Vitality and Shopping Area Policies and Policy Boundaries in Beer and Colyton' <http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/villages-plan-examination-2017/vp11vitalityassessment.pdf>. This study examines the extent of each centre and their characteristics through surveys of existing land use. The surveys, which were undertaken in January 2017, showed very low commercial vacancy rates in both centres (one out of twenty one commercial properties identified in Colyton and two

out of twenty five commercial properties in Beer). This suggests a ‘healthy’ town/village economy in both centres.

- 1.1.2 Plan 1 of VP11 illustrates a key characteristic of Beer village centre, which is the interspersing of retail premises and food and drink outlets with residential uses. The importance of tourist related uses in Beer, including hotels and guest houses, is considered to be vital to the vitality and viability of the village centre. Both the vitality assessment [VP11] and the emerging Beer Neighbourhood Plan (Policy H3 [Beer Draft Plan v2.0 06-05-16 changes accepted- new maps2.docx](#)) recognise that the visitor economy helps to maintain a higher level of shops and services than the resident population could support alone and that the liveliness of the town centre helps draw visitors to Beer. The evidence underpinning the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly public consultation responses, confirms the importance of the facilities to local residents, with the elderly and those without private transport being heavily dependent on local shops and services. Policy Beer 01 was devised to ensure that established business premises are retained, both for the benefit of local people and to help maintain Beer as an attractive visitor destination.
- 1.1.3 Colyton town centre provides a range of shops and services that meet many of the day to day needs of the town and the wider rural area. This reduces the need to travel to larger shopping centres and contributes towards the objectives of sustainable development. Policy Colyton 01 has been devised to ensure that this function is retained and that Colyton remains an attractive place to visit.
- 1.1.4 A similar policy exists in the adopted Local Plan 2013-2031 (Policy E9) promoting the provision of new and preventing the loss of existing town centre-related uses in the District’s larger town centre shopping areas [VP27]. This policy does not however incorporate Beer and Colyton due to their modest size. Outside of policy E9, existing Local Plan policy E14 only prevents significant or total loss of shops in village centres [VP27]. Due to the quantity and density of retail provision in the two settlements there is a real risk that, without the establishment of additional policies in the Villages Plan, we could experience an incremental escalation in the number of town

centre units being converted to alternative uses, the cumulative impact of which could be detrimental to the overall vitality and viability of the two centres.

- 1.1.5 The SA report considered two reasonable alternatives to inform the approach taken to Beer village centre and Colyton town centre: to define a boundary where the loss of commercial property would be resisted, or not to define a boundary [VP02, paragraphs 4.64-4.71 and Appendix 4]. The SA found that defining a boundary performed better overall, with benefits relating to promoting economic activity, encouraging pedestrian accessibility to services, promoting social and education activities, and protecting the built environment.

Question 1.2

Is policy Beer 01 consistent with national policy?

- 1.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in 2012 and sets out The Government’s planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied [National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK](#). It constitutes the Government’s view of what sustainable development means in practice for the planning system.
- 1.2.2 Paragraphs 23 to 27 deal with ‘ensuring the vitality of town centres’. Local planning authorities are advised to pursue policies to support the viability and vitality of town centres at the heart of local communities. To help achieve this the extent of town centres should be defined and policies set to make it clear which uses will be permitted, reflecting the individuality of town centres and recognising the importance of residential uses to the vitality of centres. This is the approach that has been followed in Beer.
- 1.2.3 Paragraphs 150 to 185 of the NPPF deal with plan making. Paragraph 154 makes it clear that only policies that provide a clear indication of how a decision maker should react to a development proposal should be included in the plan. Policy Beer 01 enables this while allowing flexibility to take account of individual circumstances

(such as maintaining the diversity of uses and taking into account marketing of alternative uses).

- 1.2.4 In addition, the SA report identified a range of sustainability benefits for Policy Beer 01, including significant positive benefits relating to access to community services; cultural, social and leisure provision; and maintaining the vitality and viability of the settlement [VP02, paragraph 5.23-27, and Appendix 4].

Question 1.3

Is policy Colyton 01 consistent with national policy?

- 1.3.1 Policy Colyton 01 mirrors policy Beer 01 and is consistent with national policy in the same way.