

**East Devon Local Development Framework
Final Submission by West Hill Residents' Association**

Background

Last October, following extensive public consultation, we set out a detailed response to the LDF Preferred Approach. In this we explained that our vision for West Hill was that its character should be preserved with any development being of small scale, appropriate to its surroundings, and carefully controlled so as to enhance rather than destroy the unique nature of the village.

Since that time two important surveys have taken place. The first carried out by the Community Council of Devon showed that "housing need" in West Hill was limited to a requirement for affordable housing by 9 households. The survey did not, of course, deal with the issue of whether it was appropriate to satisfy this need in West Hill.

During August, the Association carried out a wider survey which shows clearly that:

- three quarters of residents responses indicated that there is a need for some development in West Hill although most believe this should be of limited extent and in keeping with the nature of the village;
- about half supported limited development of downsizing homes and market value homes;
- less than a third support building affordable homes;
- the vast majority is against starter homes, estate development and commercial development;
- about half support new facilities in the village such as a pub, restaurant, coffee shop (but not necessarily involving new building);
- about 40% support the need for a central village green.

West Hill currently experiences limitations of infrastructure, specifically:

- sewerage and sewage treatment facilities are overloaded and SWW has no current plans to remedy this situation;
- surface water drainage is inadequate leading to flooding in places;
- the road system is unsuitable for increased traffic volumes, particularly the main through routes West Hill Road and Higher and Lower Broad Oak Rds.
- The school is over subscribed;
- Public transport is limited;
- Broadband service is poor and patchy throughout the village although this situation may be improved by planned works.

We are opposed to the imposition of targets for new homes in West Hill. We believe that the overwhelming majority of the new development proposed in East Devon should, for the foreseeable future, be located at Cranbrook and those settlements which have expressed a preference for new homes. Settlements such as West Hill which are thriving despite the limiting infrastructure and where the local residents are opposed to significant development should only have development which is targeted specifically at satisfying local needs.

However, we understand that West Hill will need to accept some development. A "target" increase of 5% over the next 15 years to 2026 has been suggested, which equates to approximately 40 dwellings. There are at present three major proposed developments in West Hill:

1. **Blue Cedar Homes'** proposal for approximately 50 homes is currently subject to appeal. It is outside the BUAB and does not satisfy the Exceptions Policy.
2. The proposal for 15 homes at **West Hayes** which includes 10 affordable homes. This has been opposed by Ottery St Mary Town Council. It is outside the BUAB but does satisfy the Exceptions Policy. The application is pending consideration by EDDC;
3. The proposal for 36 new homes on land opposite the village shop, known as **Cooper Court**, which is outside the BUAB, does not satisfy the Exceptions Policy and has been refused consent.

All three proposals were opposed by the Association as totally unsuitable and we consider that it would irresponsible to contemplate further development, other than small scale infilling of any available plots, within the existing BUAB.

Our recommendations

Recognising the special nature of our Woodland Village, the wishes of our residents and the limitations of the infrastructure, we recommend that:

1. no development should take place until the inadequate sewerage and sewage treatment deficiencies are remedied;
2. after these improvements have taken place, development in West Hill should be restricted to satisfying local needs through the provision of single storey downsizing homes and market value homes where these can be supported by an appropriate and adequate infrastructure;
3. any affordable homes should be limited to satisfying essential local needs as West Hill is generally unsuitable for such homes due to the lack of employment opportunities;
4. the existing BUAB, which is due to be reviewed as part of the Local Plan process, may need to include a limited number of new sites necessary to satisfy local needs. Any new boundary should be rigidly adhered to.

In permitting any new development, serious consideration must always be given to avoiding the unnecessary loss of agricultural land and limiting the impact on the environment. The unique environment of our villages and of the District as a whole, once damaged, can never be recreated.

The Association is extremely concerned that, during the time that the LDF/Local Plan is being prepared, there will be no clear guidelines for developers. It is essential that existing policies providing for the protection of Built Up Area Boundaries, agricultural land, and the environment remain in force until an agreed new plan is put in place.

The Way Forward

We look forward to working with both the Town and District Councils in producing a clear strategy for West Hill within the wider Local Plan.