

# East Devon Local Plan 2021 to 2040 - Issues and Options Consultation

Response on behalf of Bloor Homes South  
West

March 2021

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**Client**  
Bloor Homes South West

**Our reference**  
BLOA3007

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# 1. Introduction and Context

- 1.1 This response has been prepared by **Turley** on behalf of **Bloor Homes South West** [“Bloor Homes”] in response to the **East Devon Local Plan 2021 to 2040 Issues and Options Consultation** [“the consultation”], with respect to Bloor Homes’ interests at **Sidford High Street, Sidmouth** [“the Site”], which is shown at **Figure 1** below. The Site is already known to the Council having been the subject of a previous ‘call for sites’ submission.



**Figure 1 - Land at Sidford High Street, Sidmouth (SIDM\_02) location plan extract**

- 1.2 Our representations are structured to firstly outline the opportunity which exists for development in this location, we then respond to the specific questions posed in the consultation document.
- 1.3 As stated above this site is already known to the Council from previous ‘Call for Sites’ submissions, and is registered on the Council’s database under reference **SIDM\_02**. A pre-application submission has also been made to the Council in February 2020 and this has been considered under reference **20/0023/PREAPP**. Whilst some consultation responses were provided in response to this submission, a full set of responses and co-ordinated advice from the LPA has not yet been prepared/received.

## 2. Land at Sidford High Street, Sidmouth: The Opportunity

- 2.1 Bloor Homes control land at Sidford High Street (A3052), Sidmouth as shown on the location plan extract included at **Figure 1**. The Site extends to some **6.5ha** and is located to the north of Sidmouth and north of the A3052. A Promotional Document has previously been submitted to the Council providing detailed information about the availability and suitability of the site for development. Should the Council require further information to be submitted to assist their assessment of this site and the available development opportunity as part of preparing the new East Devon Local Plan, then we would be very happy to discuss and agree this further.
- 2.2 The Site is available for development now. The land is subject to an option agreement and is in the control of a single house builder (Bloor Homes), who is able and willing to bring forward the site for development. Bloor Homes is a national house-builder with the expertise and resources to ensure the timely and efficient delivery of new housing at this site. Development at this site is capable of contributing to the delivery of housing in the next five year period.

### Existing Policy Context

- 2.3 This Site is currently outside, but adjoining the built up area boundary for Sidmouth and is located within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [“AONB”]. The adopted East Devon Local Plan (July 2006) identifies Sidmouth as a one of the seven main towns in East Devon, and that it provides a range of services and facilities to the surrounding more rural areas, and is a major local employment area. It also identifies problems regarding:
- Constraints on residential development;
  - Restrictions in relation to the surrounding AONB;
  - Lack of available stock of housing for local people, particularly the young;
  - Under supply of recreational land and car parking.

### Site Context and Suitability

- 2.4 The Site currently comprises semi-improved grassland divided into fields bounded by hedgerows, fences and semi-natural broadleaved woodland. The Site slopes from the north east to the south west with a change in level of 30m across the full width of the Site. The Site is bounded to the north by agricultural fields, Core Hill Road to the east, Sidmouth High Street to the south and to the west Sidmouth Garden Centre and Veterinary practice.

### Access and Transport

- 2.5 The A3052 is a main road that links Lyme Regis with Exeter and runs through a number of East Devon coastal towns, including Sidmouth. The pedestrian footpath which extends from the east along the A3052, from Sidford currently stops at the south east corner of the site, at the junction of Core Hill Road. At this point there is a pedestrian

crossing, providing access to the Waitrose, Community Centre and Children's Centre on the south side of the A3052.

- 2.6 A transport access study has previously been undertaken by Clarkebond and submitted to the Council. The report concludes that two suitable access options can be accommodated at the site, in accordance with visibility and local design standards. The previously submitted Concept Masterplan (as shown at **Figure 2**) is based on access Option B. Good standard walking routes exist from the proposed site, south along Core Hill Road and east along Sidford High Street. Walking and cycling distances and journey times have been determined for the proposed site. A range of education, employment, health, leisure and shopping amenities and services are within acceptable walking and cycling distances of the site. Bus services can be accessed from existing bus stops well within a 400m walk of the site. Services provide up to a half hour frequency service and link to Sidmouth town centre and Exeter. A series of sustainable travel initiatives would be recommended to maximise sustainability.

### **Biodiversity and Nature Conservation**

- 2.7 The Site is not within or adjoining any statutory or non-statutory designated sites of nature conservation value. The nearest internationally designated site is Sidmouth to West Bay Special Area of Conservation, 2.6km to the south. The Site also lies 4.2km from East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SSSI and Species Protection Area. An ecological deliverability study, undertaken by EAD (previously submitted to the Council), concludes that there are no overriding ecological constraints to the development at the site and that development could be undertaken in accordance with biodiversity policies within the NPPF. It is considered that development could deliver biodiversity gain for the site. The site does not contain or directly adjoin any designated heritage assets or located within a Conservation Area. There are no TPOs at the site.

### **Local Landscape Considerations**

- 2.8 The site is situated within the East Devon Central Ridge Landscape Character Area (LCA). Key characteristics of this LCA recognise the strong hedgerow pattern of the Site. The landscape pattern of the area reflects the description of the landscape character set out in guidance, with woodland on the high valley sides enclosing rectilinear fields defined by hedgerows and trees. The settlement lies in the valley and rises to 100m or more, with open fields above, providing visual dominance of the lower parts of the valley side by the urban area. The potential development site lies below the 100/105m contour, an area for the most part defined by mature hedgerows and trees. Built development of the site, below the 90m contour, would follow the existing settlement pattern, and would not cause harm to either the landscape setting or landscape character. Development at the edge of Sidmouth would, in any location, require development within the AONB, although this location avoids the more sensitive coastal protection zone.

### **Flood Risk and Drainage**

- 2.9 The site lies entirely within EA Flood Zone 1. This is the lowest risk of fluvial (and tidal) flooding and has been assessed as having a less than 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding (<0.1%). A drainage scheme would be designed to be compliant with the NPPF and other relevant guidance and standards, to ensure that the risk of flooding elsewhere is not increased.

## Proposed Development

2.10 Based on an initial technical information prepared for the site, an initial Concept Masterplan has been prepared and has previously been submitted to the Council. An extract is shown at **Figure 2** below. The net developable area shown is around **3.2ha**.



**Figure 2 - Concept Masterplan extract**

2.11 The Concept Masterplan details how the proposal could comprise the following elements:

- Residential Development;
- Mixed Use Development;
- Play Area;
- Meadow Planting; and
- Allotments/Orchard.

2.12 The Concept Masterplan shows how a mixed use scheme including up to 120 dwellings could be accommodated on the site and is based on the following principles:

- Vehicular access from the A3052 High Street;
- Provision of a mixed use area adjacent to the Veterinary and Garden Centre to allow for employment within the Site;
- Creation of pedestrian links through the Site with a clear street hierarchy for all other modes;
- Development footprint kept below the 90.0m contour line and in line with adjoining built area to minimise any impact upon landscape setting or character;
- Retention of strong green infrastructure where possible and enhanced planting along the boundaries and within the open space;
- Provision of a variety of open space predominantly to the north to create areas that soften the impact of development and to provide a range for the future residents; and

- Built form to overlook POS and form strong street frontages.
- 2.13 The Concept Masterplan illustrates the proposed area for Class C3 residential development located in the southern section of the site, extending from the eastern boundary to west side of the Site. An area of mixed use development is proposed on the west boundary of the Site, adjoining Sidmouth Garden Centre.
- 2.14 A mix of uses at the Site would enable the consideration of appropriate additions to existing services and amenities in the area, as well as introducing further local economic benefits of development. The specific mix of uses to be included in the scheme have not been considered in detail and the applicant welcomes the Council's views on this element of the emerging scheme.
- 2.15 Further to the emerging development scheme shown on the Concept Masterplan, there is also scope for including a Care Home (Class C2) development within the site. The C2 element could potentially be positioned in the south east corner of the site (in place of the current mixed use area as shown to the west) or within the area indicated for mixed use development in the west of the site. This element of the development would require a net land area of c.1.3acres, which could support a c.70bed care home, which would assist in providing a mixed residential development at the site, and also support employment activity in the local area. The applicant welcome the opportunity to discuss how this aspect could be accommodated as part of future development at this site.
- 2.16 The physical development in the proposals only extends to the same northern point as Sidmouth Garden Centre to the west of the site., and any detailed development would (via careful design) respond positively to the topography of the Site, making use of carefully planned cut and fill in order to ensure that development was sited sympathetically in relation to the existing slope and having consideration for the scale of built form within the view. Such development will have the opportunity to be both exciting and visually interesting. Development will follow the landscape character guidance with reinforced hedgebanks along restored field boundaries which follow the historical pattern along the contours, copses of trees and small woods, woodland and wildflower meadows. Restricting physical development to this point with the Site responds to the topographic contours, ensuring the development protects the character of the AONB from the surrounding viewpoints.

## Summary

- Bloor Homes, an experienced developer of high quality new homes, controls land at Sidford High Street, which is available and suitable for development;
- There are no specific technical constraints to development, and a package of relevant assessments and evidence have previously been submitted to the Council;
- Development in any location around Sidmouth would require use of land which is within the AONB, however land to the North of Sidford High Street can ensure that development extends no further up the existing slopes that adjoining built

development (minimising landscape and visual impacts), and would avoid the more sensitive Coastal Preservation Area;

- Bloor Homes would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Council so as to discuss the development of this site further, and provide any additional information necessary to assist the preparation of the new Local Plan.

### 3. The Issues and Options Consultation Document

- 3.1 We have reviewed the Issues and Options consultation document in full and respond to in turn below and the relevant questions where posed.

**Question 1 - Do you think these are the right objectives for the new local plan, are there any further objectives that you would wish to see added or amendments made?**

- 3.2 We agree with the proposed objectives for the new Local Plan and propose no additional objectives to consider in its preparation.
- 3.3 We suggest additional inclusion of wording into Objective 3 to reference the ambition to fully meet needs specifically for market and affordable housing.

**Question 2 – The scope of the local plan?**

- 3.4 We agree with the Council's approach which we understand as Option 1 'produce a single local plan covering all policy matters'. In our experience, in many cases the production of 'Part 1' and 'Part 2' plans elongate the plan making process and further delay Councils in having a full up to date Plan, and the delivery of necessary new development. In many cases once the 'Part 2' Plan has been progressed, there is an immediate need to review the strategic policies included in 'Part 1'. It is however important to ensure that the preparation of a robust and up-to-date strategic policy framework is not unduly delayed by the consideration of detailed (non-strategic) matters, which could be effectively covered in other Development Plan documents (including Neighbourhood Plans) or as supplementary guidance. In this regard the content and programme for the preparation of the Local Plan should be kept under review during preparation to mitigate this risk.

**Question 3 - How do you think we should make best use of existing neighbourhood plans to inform the new local plan that we are producing?**

- 3.5 In accordance with the NPPF, all Neighbourhood Plans must be reviewed following adoption of the new Local Plan to be brought in accordance with strategic policies of the development plan. Whilst elements of the evidence base of existing Neighbourhood Plans may appear useful, they are produced in a context which has been superseded and are often inconsistent. The driver of updated Neighbourhood Plan policies should be the strategic context set by the new Local Plan.

**Question 5 - Energy efficiency of new buildings - which option do you think we should take?**

- 3.6 We generally support objectives set out in relation to Energy Efficiency and recognise the potential role that new development can and should play in delivering these outcomes through its location and scale.
- 3.7 However when these objectives are carried through into Policy, caution must be exercised on retaining deliverability and viability of the development options.
- 3.8 We consider the most logical approach to take is to be reflective of national Government approach (in respect of the route to zero carbon) and should not seek to run ahead of these. If Zero Carbon development is targeted from the beginning of the

plan this would almost certainly have consequences for other policy areas and deliverability/soundness overall. Whilst greater levels of sustainable construction are supported in principle, in the context of the significant housing requirement, this should not be pursued in a way which risks delivery and the achievement of a range of other sustainable development objectives, particularly delivery of affordable housing and other social/community infrastructure. It is therefore considered that viability must be at the heart of any decisions which could significantly increase build cost and a comprehensive approach is required which balances all aspects of planning for future development within East Devon.

- 3.9 Accordingly, the Council should where possible use the proposed changes to the Building Regulations, and other regulation where it exists. The 2019 NPPF confirms that Local Plans should avoid unnecessary duplication (para 16f). The Council is referred to the Government's proposed changes to Parts L (Conservation of Fuel & Power), F (Ventilation), M (Access to & Use of Buildings), R (Physical Infrastructure for High-Speed Electronic Communications Networks) & S (Electric Vehicle Charging in Residential & Non-residential Buildings) of the Building Regulations and the Government's proposals for biodiversity gain set out in the Environment Bill. As set out in the Planning for the Future White Paper a simpler planning process improves certainty.

**Question 7 - Do you think we have identified the appropriate carbon saving and related policy matters to be addressed in a new local plan and are there any other policy areas that you think we should be considering?**

- 3.10 As with our response to Question 5, we support the exploration of additional carbon neutrality policy objectives, however when these objectives are carried through into Policy, caution must be exercised on retaining deliverability and viability of policies and the development options.

**Question 8 - How many new homes should we plan for each year - which option do you think we should take?**

- 3.11 We are of the strong opinion that the Council should opt for 'Option 3' – to plan to build considerably more homes each year than the minimum requirements provided by Government.
- 3.12 The objectives of the Local Plan as we have mentioned should include specific reference to meeting all affordable needs. Planning for provision above minimum requirement will simply build resilience into the Plan, reduce the chances of failure against future obligations to demonstrate a five year housing land supply and pass the Housing Delivery Test.
- 3.13 Preparing the Plan with ample supply of homes will assist the Council in meeting full needs over the plan period, apply an element of safety in contingency, and maximise chances of success against the NPPF tests of soundness, particularly the requirement to be 'positively prepared' and 'effective'.
- 3.14 In any event, the Local Housing Need standard methodology is expressed in national Policy and Guidance as a minimum requirement.

- 3.15 It will also be necessary for the Council to work in collaboration with its neighbour (Exeter City) as part of the Duty to Co-operate. Should it be identified that Exeter is not able to meet all development needs within its boundaries, following a consideration of the quantum, timings and deliverability of new homes that can reasonably be relied from the options it is pursuing, then consideration may need to be given to how land within East Devon might be used to help meet this wider development need. Progressing the plan, at this stage, on the basis of a flexible and resilient supply of land, will best position the process to respond should this requirement arise in due course (following close dialogue and co-operation between the two authorities).

**Question 9 – Sites for small scale housing developments - which option do you think we should take?**

- 3.16 We consider that the Council should opt for 'Options 1 or 2', to allocate sufficient (or slightly more) small scale housing developments to accord with national guidance in the NPPF (where 10% is the minimum requirement and so the minimum level of compliance only – Option 1 – may not be considered policy which has been positively prepared).
- 3.17 For the avoidance of doubt we are clear that diversity in supply and a mix of site sizes are desirable, however a large number of new homes (as is required in East Devon), and the achievement of sustainable forms of development, is often best achieved through planning for larger scale development, including the allocation of a range of 'major development' sites (i.e. in excess of 10 dwellings, but all the way up to the consideration of New Settlements).

**Question 10– Planning for housing for people at all stages of their life**

- 3.18 In respect of this issue we would suggest that Option 4 is developed. The Local Plan should set a positive policy framework for planning for housing that suits all stages of life, by taking a positive approach which facilitates this as part of the overall housing provision within the plan. However, care is also needed and the plan should not set onerous or inflexible standards, which may restrict choice, or hinder viability and deliverability and undermine policy objectives which seek to fully meet housing needs, including the need for affordable housing.

**Question 11– Additional housing policy objectives - do you think these are appropriate housing policy areas to be addressed in a new local plan and are there any other major policy areas that you think we should be addressing?**

- 3.19 Any additional housing policy objectives (such as policy for self-build, or space standards) should be clearly identified based on the emerging evidence base for the new Local Plan, and be considered alongside deliverability of key strategic policies, as well as national policy and guidance on these matters where relevant.

**Question 14 – Additional economic policy objectives.**

- 3.20 We agree with the Council's possible additional economic policy objective number (1) which is to promote more jobs close to where people live so there is less need to travel to other locations for work purposes. We consider this is fundamental to securing the most sustainable pattern of growth for East Devon. In this regard Sidmouth will continue to play a role in meeting local employment needs as a key market town and

service centre, as well as consideration being given to more flexible and adaptable patterns of work in the future.

**Question 20 - Development in protected landscapes - which option do you think we should take?**

- 3.21 The Local Plan should (in accordance with national policy) focus on meeting development needs outside of protected landscapes where possible, albeit a sustainable strategy for the District will require development within these areas, given that large parts are within the AONB. Sidmouth and other market towns within the AONB will need to continue to be afforded opportunities to meet local needs, particularly for housing, including affordable housing, as a very restrictive approach would not appropriately reflect the needs for these areas. A robust plan will need to have regard to the range of factors relevant to the location of future development, so as to soundly show the necessary 'exceptional circumstances' for the scale of development to be accommodated within the AONB, at towns including Sidmouth.

**Question 21 – Net gains in biodiversity - which option do you think we should take?**

- 3.22 A combination of the options presented will likely be required to be acceptable to the Council to allow biodiversity net gain to be delivered on a range of sites with differing contexts, constraints and requirements.

**Question 23 – Promoting access to facilities - in order to promote walking and cycling and ensure that facilities are accessible we could adopt the possible approaches detailed below, which one would you favour? AND Question 24 - Additional sustainable transport policy objectives.**

- 3.23 In response to the Council's options, we are of the strong opinion that the Council should opt for 'Option 2' or a combination of Option 1 and 2 in order to promote walking and cycling to accessible facilities. An appropriate scale of growth at existing towns, such as Sidmouth will ensure that existing active travel networks can be used, improved and extended as appropriate and help facilitate active travel choices. As set out elsewhere there are a range of local services and facilities which would be accessible to Bloor Homes land at Sidford High Street, and we have identified how suitable connectivity might be achieved.

**Question 27 - Retaining and refining the existing settlement hierarchy - which option do you think we should take? AND Question 28 – Broad distribution of housing development - which broad approach to the distribution of housing development would you favour in a new local plan? AND Question 29 - Future options for the type and location of development.**

- 3.24 We suggest that a combination of Options 2 and 4 may be most sustainable overall, i.e. with the existing towns retained alongside a reduced number of villages, and with the addition of a possible New Settlement within the West End. This approach should be tested (with all other aspects of the Local Plan) through a Sustainability Appraisal process.
- 3.25 The scale of development requirements in East Devon will inevitably lead to a need for a selection of development options/opportunities in a number of sustainable locations.
- 3.26 One of the primary forward challenges for East Devon will be sustainably accommodating a significant annual housing requirement in housing delivery over the coming decades. As we have alluded to, we consider the best way to set the spatial

strategy to achieve this in a sustainable fashion is planning to deliver a diverse range of site sizes and scales in a range of locations.

- 3.27 In providing homes, we consider that planning to deliver a diverse range of site sizes and scales in a range of locations is essential to sustaining supply, from new settlements to small urban extensions and small sites. As directed by NPPF, the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development.

**Question 31 – Planning for development beyond 2040.**

- 3.28 We encourage the Council to extend the current plan period beyond 2040, and to plan for development accordingly.

- 3.29 We caution against progressing the new Local Plan with what we consider to be a relatively short plan period in the emerging national planning policy context. This will allow the Council to plan effectively for longer term strategic needs such as new infrastructure and new settlements. The Framework states:

*“22. Strategic policies should look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from adoption, to anticipate and respond to long-term requirements and opportunities, such as those arising from major improvements in infrastructure.” (Our emphasis)*

- 3.30 In addition to this, the current consultation draft NPPF (January 2021)<sup>1</sup> adds wording to this paragraph to state:

*“Where larger-scale development such as new settlements form part of the strategy for the area, policies should be set within a vision that looks further ahead (at least 30 years), to take into account the likely timescale for delivery.” (Our emphasis)*

- 3.31 This is particularly relevant in East Devon where larger scale developments are being considered, such as new settlements.

- 3.32 If the new Local Plan does not plan for a sufficient period given its strategy, it may be seen as not being positively prepared and inconsistent with national policy.

- 3.33 We advise formulating the LPR for a period of at least 30 years from the possible adoption date to ensure soundness can be demonstrated in accordance with the draft NPPF, and plan sufficiently for long-term requirements and opportunities, particularly in relation to new settlements and infrastructure.

**Question 32 – Are there any big planning issues that you think we have missed in this report or are there any further comments you would like to make?**

- 3.34 We have no further comments or ‘big planning issues’ that we think are missed at this stage of the plan making process, after taking into account our comments made in response the above questions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-and-national-model-design-code-consultation-proposals>

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