

Neighbourhood Planning & the Local Plan Update



September 2021

This update focuses on the relationship between Neighbourhood Planning and the work on the emerging new Local Plan, and includes an update on neighbourhood planning activity in the East Devon, and advance notification of a webinar expected to take place in early November.

We hope this provides some useful content. If you have any questions or requests for guidance on any neighbourhood planning topics please do get in touch with our Neighbourhood Planning Officer, Angela King, or a member of the Planning Policy Team.

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Database of Neighbourhood Plan Policies

To support Planning Policy officers to take account of what neighbourhood plans say in the development of the new Local Plan, a [database](#) has been developed which currently includes the policies of all made Neighbourhood Plans. This is a tool which is also now available for you to use for work in the preparation or review of neighbourhood plans, and we aim to make available publically. We would invite you to take a look at the database as it stands, to check the accuracy with regard to your own neighbourhood plan (where included), and to provide any feedback on the usefulness of this new resource, including how it could be improved.

Emerging Local Plan – Progress and Next Steps

Following the initial Issues and Options consultation and ‘Call for Sites’ between January and March this year, the Planning Policy team is continuing to develop evidence and consider potential strategy and policy approaches and options across a variety of themes. This work is reported in the form of ‘topic papers’ taken to our monthly Strategic Planning Committee meetings. These include comment on implications for neighbourhood plans. Papers are published on our [website](#) a week in advance, and meetings are streamlined live and available as recordings on our [You Tube channel](#). We encourage you to use this resource, and give consideration as to potential implications for your neighbourhood plan.

Officers have also been undertaking an initial look at submitted sites in terms of a technical assessment of their in-principle suitability for development, on a site by site basis. This includes seeking to identify potential and preferred sites for development, bearing in mind the likely level of housing numbers that will ultimately need to be accommodated. If you are not already aware of the sites submitted to us in your area, please visit our website, which includes an [interactive map](#).

An initial first working draft of the new Local Plan is expected to be taken to Strategic Planning Committee in December 2021 in order to keep plan production to the agreed timetable. This will seek to set out an indicative preferred strategy and approach to key aspects, including indication of preferred sites for development, with the aim securing a steer from Members for the work ahead. This document will be worked up over the first quarter of 2022. We will seek to engage with you and other community leaders as far as is possible in the current timescale, which would see the initial draft for public consultation starting in April 2022.

Strategic Planning Committee Meetings

The last meeting, held on 7th September, considered [papers](#) on:

- progress with the Local Plan and what could be achieved this calendar year;
 - potential strategic policy approaches to town centres, biodiversity enhancements, and landscape protection;
 - proposed arrangements for the HELAA Panel (*a ‘panel’ of key stakeholders with a recognised interest and experience in the development of land for housing and*
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employment which advises the Council on deliverability of submitted sites as part of the preparation of the HELAA (Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment);

- update related to the consideration of neighbourhood plans in the Local Plan work

Key points from the September Committee discussion for NP groups to note included:

- **LP Timetable** - agreed to an initial working draft Local Plan, with options, to be brought to the December meeting.
- **LP Strategy** - general steer that sustainability should be key to decisions on where growth goes, whilst supporting rural communities; to ensure future employment is provided together with housing, and an awareness that there may be a need to look at another new town in order to accommodate East Devon's housing requirement figures.
- **Community engagement** - agreed to the implementation of a drafted 'Communications Plan' for engaging with NP communities, including quarterly webinars.
- **NP work** - noted the short window for neighbourhood plans to be reviewed and updated under the existing adopted Local Plan, and that it would appear to generally be advisable to wait until there is greater clarity on the new Local Plan strategy.
- **Biodiversity** - Recognition and welcoming of the need to achieve 'biodiversity net gain' from developments. 'Biodiversity net gain' is an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before. The enhancement might be delivered within or near to the site being built or it could be delivered elsewhere. Members expressed a preference for this to be on-site or at least within East Devon/the local area. Members agreed to the proposal to explore the potential of going beyond a minimum 10 per cent net gain (to 20%), and for a proactive approach to identify land and projects to deliver it. Importance of valuing and protecting existing biodiversity and securing development that prioritises biodiversity was stressed, whilst recognising the need for development to be viable and achieve other priorities, such as affordable homes.
- **Town Centres/High Streets** - Recognition that high streets are changing and need to adapt, and that this may include being more flexible about different uses, including residential, going forward. Noted that this is the direction of Government policy, following the introduction of the new 'E' use class which covers a range of commercial, business and service uses and makes it easier to make changes from one to another. Support for furthering active travel (walking and cycling) to and around town centres.
- **Landscape** - Support for the work set out regarding landscape. Strong support for green wedges and preventing coalescence of settlements, and recognition of the links between landscape and biodiversity, including through green corridors.
- **HELAA Panel** - Scrutiny of the role and composition of the HELAA panel and agreement of its terms of reference, ahead of its first meeting next month.

Full detailed [minutes](#) are now available.

The [next meeting of Strategic Planning Committee](#) will take place from 2pm Tuesday 5th October. Key matters to be considered with respect to the new Local Plan are:

1. The Role and Function of Settlements
2. The Principle Of Settlement Boundaries
3. The Importance and Role of Health
4. Evidence and Potential Approaches to Sport and Recreation

For neighbourhood plan work, of particular interest are likely to be items 1 and 2 (outlined below), and there will be an opportunity to hear more about and discuss the potential approach to both at a webinar in November (see further below).

The Role and Function of Settlements

The [paper](#) (see pages 13 - 70) going to Committee next week is an update of the [previous paper](#) (see page 33) in July which presented detailed evidence to explore the role and function of settlements in East Devon, and grouped settlements with similar characteristics into a 4-tiered hierarchy. The further work has included an update of the data on current services and facilities following a 'fact check' exercise with parishes over the summer. Thank you to all those who contributed. There are no changes proposed as a result as to where it is considered settlements sit in this hierarchy. The evidence on the role and function of settlements could lead to a different approach to that taken in the adopted Local Plan. This may in turn have implications for levels and distribution of development and neighbourhood plans.

The recommended changes in the status of settlements from that in the current Local Plan would include:

- for Exmouth to be recognised as the “Principal Centre” in East Devon with a tier of its own (Tier 1) reflecting its size and nature;
 - for Budleigh Salterton to sit within Tier 3, rather than alongside the 5 remaining larger towns in the district, plus Cranbrook, that would form Tier 2;
 - for the role of 5 smaller towns and larger villages (Broadclyst, Budleigh, Colyton, Lympstone and Woodbury) to be recognised as “Local Centres” (Tier 3)
 - for a further 23 smaller settlements to be recognised as “Service Villages” (Tier 4 – “Service Villages”) - including and adding to those identified in the current adopted Local Plan, and given a Built-up Area Boundary in the accompanying Villages Plan. Proposed Tier 4 settlements, that were not previously listed in the adopted plan are: Branscombe, Broadhembury, **Chardstock**, **Dunkeswell**, Exton, Hawkchurch, **Otterton**, **Payhembury**, Plymtree, Stoke Canon, **Tipton St John**, Westclyst. The 5 shown in bold are currently covered by a made NP, with at least a further 3 covered by emerging neighbourhood plan work.
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If the new Local Plan takes a similar approach to previously each of the settlements named in the hierarchy would have a Built-up Area Boundary. Outside the settlement hierarchy, land would be considered in policy terms as open countryside. However, the paper also acknowledges the role of community-led development beyond the boundaries, through neighbourhood plans. Overall it should be stressed that at this stage this paper is purely part of the evidence base to inform the Local Plan and there will be many other factors to consider in proposing a development distribution strategy, including the principle of using settlement boundaries.

The Principle of Settlement Boundaries

You will be aware that the current Local Plan has made use of settlement boundaries to underpin both strategy and policy, through the identification of “Built-up Area Boundaries” (BUABs). Land outside the boundaries is treated as open countryside for the purposes of determining planning applications, and the aim is to manage the pattern of development and direct it to the most sustainable locations. Through drawing the BUABs tightly, the approach enabled neighbourhood plans to identify and bring forward their own sites for development as ‘exceptions’. It is also the case that a number of our made neighbourhood plans have introduced additional settlement boundaries to further specific local aspirations for specific types of small-scale development, for example at Rockbeare and Payhembury.

The [paper](#) (see pages 71 to 89) to October Committee will set out an up to date view of national policy and practice on use of settlement boundaries, and present consideration of whether or not we may want to adopt a similar approach in the new Local Plan, and when and how we might engage with communities about it.

The paper stresses the need for the final agreed approach to support delivery of the Local Plan strategy, whilst being flexible enough to adapt to different circumstances and giving a degree of certainty for decision makers and stakeholders. It explores the alternatives, including a criteria based approach (without the drawing of boundaries) or drawing the boundaries less tightly than in the past. The paper also highlights that the context for the new local plan is somewhat different to when the Villages Plan was prepared, in that there is an emphasis from national planning policy to encourage development and ensure a pipeline of developable sites, with 10% of our housing requirement to be met through smaller sites (less than 1 hectare).

The paper also highlights the importance of including parish councils, neighbourhood plan groups and developer / landowners in discussions before finalising an approach for consultation in the draft plan.

Forthcoming Webinar – Details to follow

We would like to invite representatives of Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups to join us for a discussion by webinar on the emerging new Local Plan and the role of settlements in November. The aim will be to explain and test out the rationale, options and implications of the evidence and thinking so far about the hierarchy of settlements in the District, and the use of settlement boundaries. The discussion will be used to feed into papers going before Members at Strategic Planning Committee in December. Whilst this event will not be exclusive for those engaged in neighbourhood planning, it is likely to be of relevance for plans, both emerging and made. Please note we may need to limit delegate numbers. Please look out for further details to follow from our 'planning policy' email, including date and provisional agenda.

Neighbourhood Planning – State of Play

Neighbourhood planning continues to be very active in East Devon, with a total of twenty-one 'made' plans, carrying their full weight in the decision-making process. You can find out the further details and the state of plan on all our neighbourhood plans on our website at:

- [Neighbourhood Plans being produced in East Devon - East Devon](#)

Neighbourhood plans for Colyton and Dalwood are now emerging from the penultimate step in the plan-making process of independent examination, and are expected to be able to proceed to referendum early in the new year. Neighbourhood plans for a number of other communities, including Broadclyst, Kilminster, Luppitt, are expected to be formally submitted in the near future, having completed their pre-Submission (Regulation 14) consultations. There is also work underway in several communities, including Axminster and Hawkchurch, to reinvigorate work on the preparation of neighbourhood plans, and in at least one community, to review the need for updating a made plan.

This on-going hard work and dedication by neighbourhood plan steering groups and parish councils is recognised, and groups are encouraged to liaise with us to help navigate the plan-making process, particularly in the current circumstances with a new Local Plan on the horizon.
