

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held at the Knowle, Sidmouth on Tuesday 2 August 2011

Present:

Councillors:

Mike Allen (Chairman)
Andrew Moulding

Ray Bloxham
Peter Bowden
Alan Dent
Helen Parr
Steve Wragg
Claire Wright

Also Present:

Councillors:

Derek Button
Geoff Chamberlain
Paul Diviani
Vivien Duval Steer
Jill Elson
Martin Gammell
Steve Gazzard
Roger Giles
Graham Godbeer
Tony Howard
Ben Ingham
Stephanie Jones
Frances Newth
Ken Potter
Philip Skinner
Pauline Stott
Ian Thomas
Mark Williamson

Officers:

Neil Blackmore, Landscape Architect
Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive
Matt Dickins, Planning Policy Manager
Kate Little, Head of Economy
Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager
Joe Keech, Devon County Council
Fliss Morey, Projects Director, Exeter & East Devon Growth Point
Rachel Pocock, Corporate Legal & Democratic Services Manager
Linda Renshaw, Senior Planning Officer
Claire Rodway, Senior Planning Officer
Diana Vernon, Democratic Services Manager
Chris Woodruff, AONB Manager
Frank Woolston, Senior Planning Officer

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 6.05 pm.

12 Public question time

The Chairman welcomed the Panel, Officers, Councillors and members of the public to the meeting. He invited Portfolio Holders present to sit with the Panel so that they could more readily contribute to the debate. The Chairman reminded the Panel that members of the public including representatives from parish and town councils who had submitted written evidence (which was available to view on the Council's website) in advance of the meeting would be invited to speak on individual agenda items. He commented on the quality of the written evidence received. The programme for topics/items to be discussed at future Panel meetings had also been uploaded onto the Council's website.

13 Notes of the meeting held on 12 July 2011

The notes of the of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Panel meeting held on 12 July 2011 were agreed as a true record.

14 Declarations of Interest

Councillor/Officer	Minute Number	Type of Interest	Nature of Interest
Councillor Claire Wright	General	Personal	Member of the Communities Before Developers (CBD) Campaign Group and had signed up to the CBD Candidate's Pledge
Councillor Peter Bowden	General	Personal	Owner of a plot of land at Town Orchard, Whimple
Councillor Roger Giles	General	Personal	Member of the Communities Before Developers (CBD) Campaign Group and had signed up to the CBD Candidate's Pledge
Councillor Derek Button	General	Personal	Member of the Communities Before Developers (CBD) Campaign Group and had signed up to the CBD Candidate's Pledge

15 National Planning Policy Framework

The Chairman invited the Head of Economy to outline the implications of the draft National Planning Policy Framework. The Head of Economy advised that the Council was required to submit its comments on the National Planning Policy Framework by 17 October. The Framework summarised existing policies and reflected the current Government's drive for more succinct Local Plans, a presumption in favour of sustainable development and a greater reliance on an evidence base. A more detailed report would be referred to the Panel in due course.

16 Housing and Employment Study

The Chairman invited members of the public and representatives of local parish and town councils who had submitted written evidence to speak on the issues they wished to raise in respect of the housing and employment study. Issues raised included:

- Sustainable development was key and adopting fixed housing figures should not constrain sustainable growth,
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) identified sites that could accommodate over 15,000 dwellings within East Devon in the 2006-2026 period, (The Preferred Approach document of 2010 specifically planned for 16,400.)
- The Council needed to be able to protect identified areas from development,
- There needed to be consistency between policies, with existing policies being up-dated as necessary to harmonise with new policies being brought forward as part of the Local Plan process,
- Planning should reflect the current economic climate and not use trends based on past performance which predicted a consistent 3% economic growth,
- Increase in housing provision was not synonymous with economic growth,
- There was a danger that increasing housing provision was catering for inward migration rather than the people of East Devon,
- Economic development had far reaching effects including permanent loss of Grade 1 agricultural land, increase in traffic levels and environmental damage,
- Not all of the assumptions within the Roger Tym and Partners' East Devon Housing and Employment Study interim report had been publically scrutinised or were fully evidenced,
- Jobs could not be created as quickly as homes built – based on the assumption of one job per home, how realistic was it to be able to create 15,000 jobs within the Plan period?
- East Devon was a diverse district with different needs.
- The problem of low local wages and relatively high cost of housing was acknowledged.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their valued comments.

Devon County Council's technical paper included with the agenda on housing provision in Devon set out the rationale for strategic housing provision and the need to take into account 4 main factors, namely, housing demand using past trends and current data, economic development and job growth, development delivery (which was reliant on funding for necessary infrastructure) and housing need. The County wide trends provided a useful context for forward planning by districts.

16 Housing and Employment Study (cont).

Russell Porter of Tym and Partners presented the draft report 'East Devon Housing and Employment Study' which set out interim findings of a three months' study into East Devon's housing and employment growth (including trends, drivers and potential areas for growth). This would be used as an evidence base for the Council's preparation of its emerging Local Plan. The findings would be used to test scenarios and provide projections.

The Panel and Councillors attending the meeting were invited to comment and the following issues were raised:

- It would be useful for the Local Plan documentation to include a clear definition of sustainability within the context of East Devon,
- Lack of available housing was a constraining influence on employers,
- There was not necessarily a direct link between the viability of a town centre and its size – all Chambers of Commerce should be encouraged to attend future meetings for their input,
- Planning for economic growth needed to take into account the future impact of the New Growth Point (including SkyPark and the Science Park) and increased reliance on high speed broadband which would reduce the need for serviced office accommodation and meant that the businesses did not need to be located or linked to an area of economic activity,
- The Panel needed to understand local issues/need, protect the environment and identify and decide on drivers for growth.
- A range of dwellings would meet the diverse needs of the district; this would be of varying density, for example, residential care was high density accommodation,
- It would be useful to plot existing East Devon employment units and demography – what was the current demand for office space and could large business units be converted to meet market need?
- There was concern that some of the floor-space per person data used was based on comparisons in the south east,
- It could be short-sighted to use the current economic down-turn to influence future trends. This approach could result in the district being unprepared to meet future growth,
- The 'travel to work' map within the Study did not indicate a change in the boundary of the New Growth Area - it showed that the area where 20% of workers travelled to Exeter.
- Large scale housing development without provision of jobs would result in an unbalanced economy,
- The Panel needed to take public feedback on the Preferred Option Approach into account.

In summing up the debate, the Chairman referred to the necessary balance between economic development and housing provision. The Council had to plan for growth to achieve a balanced economy. Evidenced information indicated that planning for less than 15,000 dwellings for East Devon (2006-2026) was not viable.

16 Housing and Employment Study (cont).

The Chairman advised that the Government Inspectors were assuming that the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) figure would be used as a basis for planning and that there would need to be strong evidence to adopt a working figure of less than this. The Panel was asked to support the base figure of 15,000 which would be used for scenario testing within the tight timetable of preparation to ensure that future growth was plan-led rather than developer-led. The Panel was reminded that it did not have decision making powers but made recommendations to Development Management Committee; the recommended base figure would be used to help progress future work. Various base-line figures were proposed and voted on as alternatives.

RECOMMENDED that the base line figure of 15,000 dwellings for East Devon (2006-2026) be used to progress future work and facilitate scenario testing.

17 Rural Areas Policy Paper – Strategy for Development in Rural Areas

The Chairman invited members of the public and representatives of local parish councils who had submitted written evidence to speak on the issues they wished to raise in respect of the draft rural areas policy paper. Issues raised included:

- There was a need to proactively plan for the development needs of rural areas, there was currently a housing shortage which could be met by releasing land for development. This may involve reviewing existing settlement boundaries to allow limited growth.
- A range of houses were needed to meet local need,
- Any development needed to recognise the individual characteristics of the villages,
- Local communities should be allowed to assess their own needs and determine the size and location of development. Parish Plans should be taken into account – local communities would know how best to sustain their facilities,
- Land availability had been identified through SHLAA and could meet need,
- Development would result in further loss of agricultural land; green wedges needed to be protected,
- The impact of Cranbrook on neighbouring parishes needed to be quantified, assumptions checked and taken into account. When clarified, mitigating measures could be investigated.
- Concern that the allocation of housing based on three tiers of settlement type (Hubs – up to 50 houses over the Plan period, Villages with Built-up Area Boundaries - up to 20 houses and Rural Areas – affordable housing and local needs housing only) was too much of a one-size-fits-all approach.

The Panel was asked to consider the alternative approaches to development in rural areas and make recommendations on the way forward. Two strategic options to consider were either to adopt a district-wide reasoned strategy with a consistent approach to rural development or adopt an approach that recognised local differences with the residents of individual settlements being asked to define what they saw as appropriate development levels.

17 Rural Areas Policy Paper – Strategy for Development in Rural Areas (cont)..

Members were advised that an overall increase of 5% in dwellings (total of 780 new homes) in Preferred Approach hub settlements and other villages would maintain a stable population. This would be used as the default minimum figure. Above this, villages could propose a further figure which would form part of the Local Plan proposed housing numbers. Any additional housing number proposals made through the Neighbourhood Plans would be outside the Local Plan figures.

Members were asked to consider the relevance of Neighbourhood Plans (within the Localism Bill) in their deliberations and how they could be used to determine the scale and location of growth in rural areas. Local communities would be invited to influence local decision making such as the levels, type and location of development, within the overarching district strategy, based on local consensus and co-operation.

Anticipated community interest in Neighbourhood Plans was evidenced through the number of East Devon parishes which had already produced, or were in the process of producing, Parish Plans and/or Village Design Statements. However parishes which had produced Parish Plans and Design Statements (which were non statutory documents) had expected these to have more weight in the planning process than they actually did. Concern was raised at the anticipated time and cost of producing Neighbourhood Plans and a suggestion made that, as an alternative, more weight be given to existing Parish Plans and Design Statements. A prototype Neighbourhood Plan would provide useful guidance and should reduce time and cost involved. Ward Members were best placed to try to involve 'hard to reach' communities and ensure that feedback was from as wide a base as possible.

In summing up the debate the Chairman advised that a flexible approach in consultation with local settlements and in response to local needs was the best way forward but that a default position for minimal growth was justified. The approach would provide a reasoned district-wide strategy with local flexibility.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that the Council establish an overarching strategy for rural areas with a starting point for settlements to typically accommodate at least a 5% increase in the number of existing homes (as defined by the current Local Plan Built-up Area Boundaries),
 - (2) that further work (using the 5% increase as a starting point) be carried out to look at other issues including:
 - Current facilities and services that a settlement already has and any catchment it might serve (this reflects the Hub approach adopted in the Preferred Approach document),
 - The ability/likelihood of development to help sustain existing facilities (reflecting the other villages categorisation in the Preferred Approach),
 - Physical and environmental constraints and opportunities,
 - Local expressions of interest.

18 Renewable Energy and Climate Change

The South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEEG) had been appointed by the Council to advise on carbon reduction and renewable energy issues and help provide the Panel with a steer in respect of the energy/carbon reduction/sustainability component of the Core Strategy.

The Chairman invited Dr Dan Lash of the Centre for Energy and the Environment to present his commissioned study on renewable energy and climate change - 'An Initial Review of Renewable Energy Potential in East Devon'. The report set out current carbon emissions in East Devon, main sources, comparisons with the wider area and potential for alternative sustainable energy provision. Dr Lash explained the Government's target of zero carbon homes, minimum energy efficiency standards and the need for plans to be in place to address local need in order to secure Government funding.

The Panel understood that incorporating and improving sustainability and carbon reduction measures for new development would form an important part of the overall strategy of the LDF. As already proven through Cranbrook, policies would go beyond the minimum standards defined by national policy. There were opportunities to embrace new technologies. However concern was raised that without securing Government funding, sustainability measures could result in new homes being unaffordable to build.

It was important to regard all options positively with the aim of achieving more self-sufficiency and reducing carbon emissions. The Council needed to encourage the use of renewable energy. The Core Strategy could be used to address Climate Change by limiting the impact of development on the environment through sustainable construction and use of renewable energy such as micro-generation (individual homes and businesses generating their own energy), wind turbines, solar and biomass. A policy would be needed to cover combined heat and energy installations (as at Cranbrook). Work had been commissioned to deliver smaller scale installations elsewhere in the district.

The Chairman thanked Dr Lash for his informative and interesting presentation.

- RECOMMENDED**
- (1) that further work be commissioned on energy saving measures in buildings and on on/off-site renewable energy production in order to inform policy;
 - (2) that large scale developments, such as those in the West End, be required to be served from some form of renewable energy district heating system.