

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Notes of a Meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel held at the Knowle, Sidmouth on Tuesday 16 August 2011

Present: Councillors:
Mike Allen (Chairman)
Andrew Moulding

Ray Bloxham
Peter Bowden
Alan Dent
Helen Parr
Steve Wragg
Claire Wright (part of)

Also Present: Councillors:
Geoff Chamberlain
Paul Diviani
Christine Drew
Vivien Duval Steer
Jill Elson
Martin Gammell
Steve Gazzard
Roger Giles
Graham Godbeer
Peter Halse
Tony Howard
Frances Newth
Ken Potter
Graham Troman
Ian Thomas
Mark Williamson

Officers:
Drew Aspinwall, Growth Point Communications Officer
Matt Dickins, Planning Policy Manager
John Golding, Head of Housing
Kate Little, Head of Economy
Fliss Morey, Projects Director, Exeter & East Devon Growth Point
Linda Renshaw, Senior Planning Officer
Claire Rodway, Senior Planning Officer
Andrew Seddon, Senior Solicitor
Hannah Whitfield, Assistant Democratic Services Officer
Andy Wood, Head of Infrastructure and Partnerships, Exeter and East Devon Growth Point

Apologies: Councillors:
Stephanie Jones
Philip Skinner

The meeting started at 2.05 pm and finished at 4.53 pm.

19 Public question time

The Chairman welcomed the Panel, Officers, Councillors and members of the public to the meeting. The Panel was reminded that members of the public 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.

The Chairman advised that it had been necessary to revise the programme for topics/items to be discussed at future Panel meetings and those items not discussed at the previous meeting would feature on future agendas. The revised programme could be viewed on the Council's website.

A member of the public who had submitted evidence in relation to Coastal Erosion asked for this item to feature at the beginning of the 13 September agenda.

20 Notes of the meeting held on 2 August 2011

The notes of the of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Panel meeting held on 2 August 2011 were discussed and agreed as a true record, subject to the following sentence being deleted:

'Evidenced information indicated that planning for less than 15,000 dwellings for East Devon (2006-2026) was not viable'.

Further clarification was sought in respect of the recommended minimum 5% dwelling increase in villages and whether figures above this level, proposed by the villages, would form part of the overall housing figure for East Devon. The Chairman advised that this issue would be clarified at a future meeting.

21 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 Ray Bloxham	General	Personal	Member of the National Trust
Councillor Peter Bowden	General	Personal	Owner of a plot of land at Town Orchard, Whimble
Councillor Alan Dent	General	Personal	Member of the National Trust
Councillor Helen Parr	General	Personal	Member of Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)

21 Declarations of Interest (cont)

Councillor Andrew Moulding	General	Personal	Councillor was the Chairman of Cloakham Lawns Sports and Social Club
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 Jill Elson	General	Personal	Governor at Exmouth Community College

22 Draft Strategic Housing Viability Assessment

Roger Tym and Partners and Three Dragons presented the interim report on the Strategic Housing Viability Assessment, which had been commissioned to aid the Council in establishing viable thresholds and percentages for affordable housing in East Devon. The methodology for the study and a review of the key assumptions used for carrying out viability testing were explained. It was noted that in future there would be limited subsidy for affordable housing.

Initial findings of the study had shown that:

- Residual values varied with development type and the percentage of affordable housing applied;
- Viability of a site did not necessarily improve at higher density levels;
- Any rise in market values would have a significant impact;
- Replacing affordable rent with social rent would reduce viability;
- There was a trade off between carbon reduction (Code for Sustainable Homes), planning obligations (such as Community Infrastructure Levy) and the percentage of affordable housing that could be achieved.

Targets

East Devon could be divided into a number of market value areas, with rural areas and coastal towns/areas of the district generally having a higher market value than urban areas. Current policy (in the adopted Local Plan) sought 40% affordable housing on sites of 15 or more dwellings in urban areas and sites of 5 or more dwellings in rural areas. However Members heard that from the analysis it would seem inappropriate to retain a single percentage target for affordable housing across the district and that separate targets for urban and rural/coastal areas would better reflect the viability evidence gathered. Coastal towns/areas and many rural areas could sustain 40% or more affordable housing targets whilst a target closer to 25% would be more appropriate for the inland towns and areas close to Exeter.

22 Draft Strategic Housing Viability Assessment (cont)

Thresholds

With regard to thresholds, evidence gathered suggested that it would be viable to reduce the current thresholds (from 15 in urban areas and 5 in rural areas) for affordable housing contributions. The Council could consider the option of seeking to secure affordable housing contributions from every net new home built.

The Panel and Councillors attending the meeting were invited to comment and ask questions. The following observations/questions were raised:

- Strategic urban extensions, which had not been included in the study, would have a large influence on the level of affordable housing that could be delivered in East Devon. In response Members were advised that there was a need to take the study further to test the West End, as this was where a large element of East Devon's housing would be delivered. The market value in this area would be very different from the rest of East Devon, however initial thoughts were that the Exeter urban extensions would achieve 25% affordable housing.
- Historically a large number of development schemes had been small sites (under 15 houses in urban areas and under 5 houses in rural areas) which were largely believed to be driven by the existing policy. Removing the thresholds would result in different supply patterns.
- Due to the low wage economy in the area many people would be eligible for housing benefit even if they were in full time employment.
- Affordable housing contribution should be achieved via a roof tax on every new property built.
- Reducing the threshold to 'net one gain' would result in financial contributions from sites of only one dwelling for example. Members were advised that there were examples of other planning authorities that had very low thresholds. Thresholds were not included in the Draft National Planning Framework.
- Concern was raised that reducing the threshold to a very low number would discourage development.
- The Study focused on financial viability and not the need for affordable housing in East Devon. The Head of Housing advised Members that the need for affordable housing was significant and had been tested – this included a Housing Market Assessment which would be presented to Panel Members at a future Panel meeting. It was recognised that the Housing Register was not reliable in terms of evidence for need, however 3000 people were registered. 250 affordable homes were required per annum in order to meet the housing need in East Devon. 108 affordable homes had been built the previous year.
- The Council's target of 40% had not addressed the need for affordable homes in East Devon and therefore must be reviewed. The Council no longer had the land bank it once did and with no grant available it was reliant on the private sector to deliver affordable housing.
- The suggested different percentage targets for rural, Sidmouth and coast areas and urban areas were driven by residual values. Higher targets in areas where there were higher residual values would not affect development levels in those areas.
- Percentage target rate was key to meeting affordable housing need.

The Chairman thanked Lin Cousins (Three Dragons) and Mark Felgate (Roger Tym and Partners) for their informative presentation. This was echoed by the rest of the Members.

22 Draft Strategic Housing Viability Assessment (cont)

- RECOMMENDED** that the following proposals/areas be explored further as a way of trying to address East Devon's affordable housing need:
- that planning policy identifies separate affordable housing percentages for differing parts of the District, based on viability considerations;
 - that these percentage rates apply to all development schemes from one net dwelling upwards;
 - that policy refers to viability considerations and allows review if economic circumstances change;
 - that the Strategic Housing Viability Assessment be extended to test strategic urban extensions in the West End and the implications these developments might have on delivery of affordable housing in East Devon.

23 Housing for Elderly Persons in Rural Areas

Members considered a report on housing for elderly persons in rural areas present by the Planning Policy Manager. East Devon had an elderly population profile which would increasingly become a concern for the District. Frequently older residents were keen to continue living in the towns and villages in which they had grown up and/or currently lived. However as people aged, for health/mobility issues for example, it was not always possible for them to remain in their current accommodation (often their large family home). More suitable accommodation was normally found in towns rather than in rural areas, which would mean that older residents would have to move away from their community support networks.

The Community Council of Devon had published a report on the housing aspirations of older people living in rural Devon in January 2011. This report was considered to be a positive evidence base around which future policy could be built. Members' attention was drawn towards the key findings of the report, in particular finding 'f', which stated that:

'Local authorities need to consider amending planning policy which restricts open market housing development for older people in rural villages. This may lead to older residents being forced to move away from their community support networks to find the cheap and easy to maintain new home that they need to allow them to continue to live independently.'

Members were also advised of a study undertaken by Reading University and written evidence submitted to the Panel on behalf of Blue Cedar Homes (available on the website).

The Panel and Councillors were invited to comment on the strategic options available with regard to policy on provision of housing for elderly persons in rural areas. Comments included:

- Properties for the elderly need to be affordable.
- Park homes for the over 55s could provide a viable and affordable solution.
- Need to increase the size, style of housing available.
- The key findings in the Community Council of Devon report support the need for development in rural areas.

23 Housing for Elderly Persons in Rural Areas (cont)

- Life-time homes can expand as a family grows and be adapted for elderly people - cannot be downsized once expanded.
- Farming families broken up when the younger generation takes over running the farm as policy does not allow for buildings to be converted for the next generation. Addressing this issue was considered to be vital to the future of farming.
- Flexibility in the policy is required to allow for response to a need in an area.
- Many elderly people want to move out of their homes to release capital but there was not enough suitable and affordable accommodation available.
- Key findings should be altered to read 'their neighbourhood' instead of 'their home'.
- Need provision of affordable and market housing of the right type to create better balanced communities.
- Single elderly people have unique needs that need to be recognised – look at care/support as well as accommodation.

RECOMMENDED

- 1 that policy be redrafted to make provision for housing suitable for elderly persons at all villages where market and affordable housing was allowed/promoted through policy.
- 2 that elderly person housing should encompass:
 - a. open market housing (where practical/viable, including owner occupied retirement housing);
 - b. affordable housing for local people
 - c. life-time homes; and
 - d. provision for succession planning in rural farming communities.

24 Consultation with Young People

Members considered a summary report on consultation with young people presented by the Senior Planning Officer. There were significantly less residents in their late teens – 30 age group in East Devon than was typical in the rest of the UK. Many young people appeared to leave the district after completing secondary education. There was concern that with fewer young people there would be issues regarding shortage of skilled workforce and a lack of 'carers' to support the growing elderly population in their everyday lives.

Young people had been encouraged to comment during the 2010 consultation on the Preferred Approach document using less traditional consultation methods such as social networking sites and in class events. Findings of the consultation with young people were available on the Council's website.

Further evidence was required as to the reasons behind young people deciding to leave the District, however existing research had suggested it was due to a lack of opportunities for further education, lack of skilled employment, search for higher wages and lack of housing to buy or rent at an affordable price to young people. If the trend was to be reversed the reasons for leaving must be addressed.

24 Consultation with Young People (cont)

The Head of Economy advised Members that the Local Plan would not have a specific section on young people, however was an area that would be addressed throughout the Plan.

A Member of the Panel read out comments from the Youth Member Champion, who had left the meeting to attend another appointment. She advised that consultation with young people in East Devon had shown that they recognised the importance of climate change, renewable energy and building sustainable homes. Transport, employment, social and recreational facilities, affordable housing and safeguarding the environment were all areas that young people had highlighted as an issue. There was a need to provide employment opportunities and affordable homes to retain young people in the area.

Members discussed a policy approach which would actively support the needs of young people and encourage them to remain in the District. Comments included:

- Consultation results show that young people in Sidmouth are happy to remain living in the town, perhaps due to the entertainment that was available, such as the beach and the cinema.
- Transport was a major concern for young people, particularly in rural areas.
- Vast changes ahead with regard to education.
- A majority of young people will always leave the area to attend university and to seek new opportunities.
- Need to be clear when referring to affordable housing – many young people aspire to be home owners but need it be affordable. There was a recognised need for affordable rent.
- Definition of the difference between affordable housing and low cost value market housing required.
- Concern that 1 home:1 job cannot be delivered – further evidence required.
- Should be considering 2 jobs:1 house as in most cases two incomes were needed to support a mortgage.
- Self-build considered an affordable way of owning a house.
- Need for further consultation with young people, particularly the 16 – 25 age group.
- Affordable housing was housing that people could afford no matter what their income.
- Policy should support the provision of further education – should be proactive and positive in helping colleges to grow.

RECOMMENDED

- 1 that the policy be redrafted, subject to further evidence gathering, to:
 - Support the provision of further education opportunities, at existing colleges and as part of employment based training;
 - Provide housing suited to first time buyers and also relevant affordable housing;
 - Require training/apprenticeship posts as part of major employment planning applications and as part of the 1 home/1 job approach.
- 2 that the consultation strategy should seek young people's views in ways which encourage them to participate.