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My interest is as a business owner developing an organic vegetable and fruit growing space for a community of growers in Aylesbeare with a plan to develop a service for robotics in horticulture and viticulture addressing the key problems of labour availability and reducing chemical use in food production. I live nearby in Lympstone.

My qualifications for commenting are as an inventor and entrepreneur of robotic milking, rumen telemetry and in-line milk analysis. The startup companies I owned developing the latter technologies were based at the Exeter Science Park and sold as going concerns during the pandemic. As a former coordinator of the Greenhouse Gas Research of Defra 2010-2014 I have a particular interest in the changes being proposed by Defra in terms of public money for public goods. Although the policy implementation is very slow it will have a major impact on a large number of farms in East Devon which only survive because of the single farm payment which is being phased out following Brexit.

Comments on the Local Plan

My interests are in agriculture and low carbon living and although the plan is broadly in line with expected eastward peri-urban growth of Exeter it is very weak on the future of agriculture in the largely rural area.

Road Transport

The broad verges of the A3052 from Clyst St Mary to Aylesbeare should be converted to provide pedestrian/cycle lane as an immediate safety requirement. At present the Number 9 bus is used by workers and customers at the numerous businesses on this route (Westpoint, Hill Barton, Creally, Greendale, Exeter City training ground etc) and movement on the road between the stops is very dangerous due to the volume of fast traffic. Kindly bus drivers often drop passengers on request on the basis that it is too dangerous for passengers to alight and walk between official stops.

Provision for cyclists and walkers will be even more essential if either of the proposed new town sites are developed.

Rail

At present the maximum frequency of trains on the Exmouth – Exeter line is limited to every 30 minutes as there is only one passing loop at Topsham. There should be another passing loop on this line as trains are very crowded at commuting times and in the summer season.

Agriculture

83 Development on High Quality Agricultural Land

There is a major conflict here in that the very fertile lower lying Pebblebed soils South of the A3052 which are suitable for vineyards and horticulture are all included in an area suitable for solar farms. Given the growing problems and carbon cost of importing vegetables from the very polluted areas of Murcia in Spain this looks short sighted. Unfortunately the farming industry has not responded well to the CAP and there is a surplus of low value sheep and beef production in Devon on soils that could be producing fresh vegetables and high value fruits. Many of these farmers will cease grazing systems and allow the coverage of their fields by solar systems and there is a danger that the land will become unusable for future food production

The plan should encourage high value cropping systems with minimal tillage to reduce the run-off into the Exe Estuary which is being silted up due to historic style ploughing still common on arable land mostly North of Exeter.

Future land management should be based on catchment areas with designs to slow down water flow and enable capture of silt from eroding farmland. There seem to be few references to this in the plan.