

## **East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2042, Second Regulation 19 Consultation**

**Closing date: 26 January 2026**

### **Response on behalf of Somerset Council**

#### **Introduction**

1. Thank you for consulting Somerset Council on the East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2042 – Second Regulation 19 Publication Draft, November 2025. As you will be aware on 1 April 2023 a new unitary Somerset Council was formed, this combined the five authorities of Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, South Somerset and Somerset County.
2. The comments in this response focus on matters relating to strategic cross-boundary issues. They should be read in conjunction with the submissions on behalf of the former South Somerset District Council in January 2023 in response to the Consultation Draft Plan (Regulation 18), those submitted on behalf of Somerset Council in response to the Further Consultation in June 2024 and the response to the first Regulation 19 consultation in March 2025.

#### **Proposed Growth at Axminster**

3. It is noted that a total of at least 1,391 dwellings (down from 1,409) and 2.8 ha of employment land plus an unspecified amount of employment land as part of the mixed-use allocations on Land at Axminster Carpets (Axmi\_07) and Websters Garage (Axmi\_17) is proposed at Axminster. The employment allocation on land west of Musbury Road is proposed to be deleted.
4. Axminster is located to the west of the border between Somerset and East Devon. The Primary Market Town of Chard is located within Somerset approximately 11 km east of Axminster. The former South Somerset District Council previously commented on the potential impact of additional traffic generation to employment areas at Chard because of planned growth at Axminster.
5. Submitted evidence base document East Devon Local Plan 2020 – 2042 Forecast Impact on the Strategic Road Network Honiton and Axminster, January 2025 (TRI-022) has assessed the impact of proposed allocations on the junctions with the strategic road network (SRN) at Honiton and Axminster and has confirmed that there is capacity on the SRN for the proposed growth, this is welcomed. The allocation of employment land providing job opportunities along with housing should help to increase the self-containment of Axminster. No objections are raised.

#### **Nutrient Neutrality – River Axe Special Area of Conservation**

6. As previously noted, Somerset Council has been working with the Lead Authority, East Devon DC to address the issues relating to nutrient neutrality in the River Axe Special Area of Conservation. This matter is ongoing. Somerset Council confirm that they will

continue to work with East Devon Council to address this issue. As previously stated, the inclusion of Strategic Policy PB04: Habitats Regulation Assessment, particularly the section on nutrient neutrality in the River Axe SAC catchment is welcomed.

### **Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

7. It is noted that East Devon DC can accommodate the housing needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople within their own district boundary. As an adjoining LPA East Devon will be aware that Somerset Council have commissioned their own Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment which is now expected to be finalised in early 2026. This will remain an area for continued engagement.

### **Duty to Cooperate**

8. The Draft Statement of Compliance CSD-010a identifies housing – issues H01-H03, Employment - Issue E01, Climate Change – Issue C01 and Water Quality – Issue W01 as being strategic cross boundary issues with Somerset. It is agreed that these are relevant issues for cooperation.
9. Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) on Housing, Employment and Site Allocations, Environment and Infrastructure and Transport have been produced (CSD-010b-d). Signatures have not been sought at this stage, but the documents confirm that Somerset Council will be invited to sign the Housing, Employment and Site Allocations and the Environment and Infrastructure SoCGs at the Submission stage of the plan-making process. Somerset Council confirms that it looks forward to receiving the final versions of the relevant SoCGs for review and signing and that it will continue to engage with East Devon Council on strategic cross-boundary issues.
10. Paragraph 5.17 of CSD – 010b states the following:  
*It is agreed between East Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Mid Devon, Exeter, Teignbridge and Torbay that, any consideration of meeting the housing requirements of other LPA's should be informed by a joint objective assessment, to an agreed and defined methodology, that runs across local authority boundaries to assess suitability for development of potential housing developments sites.*  
It is suggested that this may require amendment given that Somerset and Dorset are now part of the Wessex Partnership.
11. East Devon will be aware that the statutory Duty to Cooperate (DtC) was abolished in primary legislation under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which gained Royal Assent in October 2023. The Act removes the obligation for local planning authorities to formally collaborate on strategic planning matters during local plan preparation and replaces it with a new "flexible alignment" requirement. However, these provisions have not taken effect yet and not in force until enabling regulations are published. The government has not yet specified a timetable for bringing those regulations into effect.

**General**

12. Somerset Council confirms that it raises no issues regarding the soundness of the East Devon Local Plan 2020 to 2042.

**Planning Policy Team**