

Introduction

Clinton Devon Estates are the owners of a very large area of land within East Devon. As part of its interests, the Estate undertakes residential and commercial development and manages substantial farming and forestry operations. It is also an important custodian of the area's environment, notably the Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve. The Estate therefore has considerable interest in the future form of development in East Devon. Within this context, and having reviewed the draft local plan, the Estate has a number of observations on the policies which are now proposed. These follow on from representations which have previously been made by the Estate to earlier drafts of the plan, notably the Issues and Options version in 2021.

General Observations

It is acknowledged that the Plan is in draft form and that the approach it advocates may evolve as the document progresses. Nonetheless, it does set out a clear strategic approach regarding the amount and location of development for both housing and employment uses. Despite this, we note that there are still a number of fundamental uncertainties which have yet to be addressed but which could have important implications for the strategic approach set out.

- i) **Housing.** In relation to housing, a fundamental part of the Plan's approach is to identify a requirement to deliver a new settlement on land within the A3052 corridor to the east of Exeter. Currently, the Plan does not propose any clear solution for how this requirement will be met and identifies three different options, each of which are in slightly different locations, have different capacities and are subject to varying degrees of deliverability and constraint. Ultimately, the choice of option could have significant implications on the rest of the housing strategy. It therefore seems premature to seek to progress the draft proposals ahead of a clear decision being made on which growth option to pursue.

It is also unclear why the Plan seeks to identify 2nd preference sites (see Policy 2 and the proposed allocations for the individual settlements). The housing requirement set out under Policy 2 suggests that the 2nd preference sites are required in order that the Council can meet its overall housing requirement. On this basis, the relevant sites should be clearly identified and the use of a 2nd preference category dropped. Retention of this categorisation simply introduces uncertainty especially as we cannot see any specific justification within the text for its use.

- ii) Employment. We note that the Plan's economic approach is to create conditions for a sustainable, green economy which secures high values and increases wages. Such an approach is welcomed given the long standing issues which affect the District, for example in relation to seasonal nature of the tourism economy and the low wages affecting many of those involved in the rural economy. We also note that at this stage, only a skeleton spatial approach is set out – for example to allocate more land for employment in the western part of the District and to support the continued use of existing employment sites. The draft Plan notes that a key part of the Council's employment evidence/strategy, the Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) has yet to be published. Presumably, this will be used to inform both the amount and location of future employment uses and it would therefore seem premature to advance the Plan – including proposing employment allocations at a range of sites – in advance of the EDNA being published.

For these reasons, we have a number of concerns about the lack of robust evidence to support key aspects of the Plan and therefore OBJECT to the relevant policies in the plan which rely upon this analysis.

The Vision for East Devon

The draft local plan sets out a proposed vision for the District. This seeks to provide better homes and communities for all, promote a greener district which address climate change, supports the natural environment and which encourages a more resilient local economy.

The Estate SUPPORTS the vision as proposed.

Policy 1 (Spatial Strategy)

Policy 1 sets out the strategy which is proposed with regards to the location and amount of future development across the District. The key thrusts of the proposed spatial strategy are to focus most development within the western part of the District, including the provision of a new settlement. Importantly, Exmouth is identified as the sole top tier settlement, being a 'Principal Centre' where significant new growth is proposed. Below this tier, a number of towns are identified as Main Centres able to accommodate substantial new growth. The strategy proposes to identify a further tier of settlements as Local Centres where development will be supported, with the final tier being service villages.

The Estate strongly supports the identification of Exmouth as being the Tier 1 settlement and the main location for new growth. Given the size of the town, the range of services and facilities available there and its public transport connectivity, it is correct that the town be given the top tier status and that it be identified as the main location for growth. Although the town is close to a number of environmental sensitive areas, the nature of the District means that there are few alternative locations where sustainable development can take place which are also free of such sensitivities. Every effort should therefore be made to bring forward suitable development sites around the town in order to make the most of the Exmouth's sustainability attributes.

The Estate also supports the approach which the draft spatial strategy advocates in relation to the other tiers. In relation to the individual settlements:

- the Estate strongly supports the identification of Budleigh Salterton and Woodbury as being settlements within the Local Centre tier. Both settlements have a good range of facilities and this justifies their inclusion in this tier and are suitable to accommodate development.

- The Estate also supports the identification of the villages of Beer, East Budleigh, Exton, Newton Poppleford and Otterton as settlements within the Service Village tier. These villages are also well equipped with a range of facilities and are suitable to accommodate some more limited levels of growth as way of diversifying the supply of housing and supporting the long term vitality of these communities. Some development in these villages will also help the rural economy by supporting the vitality of local services and providing much a much needed additional source of housing for those involved in the rural economy.

In summary, the Estate strongly supports the approach set out in Policy 1. However, due to the uncertainty which arises from the absence of full resolved evidence on the location of the new settlement and on economic development (see our General Observations, above), the Estate wishes to OBJECT to the policy until these issues are more clearly resolved.

Policy 5 (Mixed Use Development)

This policy seeks to require new housing development to come forward alongside commercial or community uses. For developments of 100 homes or more, 0.4 hectares of non residential uses are required to be delivered. Within the Tier 3 and 4 (Local Centre and Service Village) settlements, schemes of 25 units or more need to be delivered alongside 0.1 hectares of non-residential uses.

The policy as currently draft does allow some deviation from this approach but only in very limited circumstances, for example where the equivalent level of provision is being delivered elsewhere in the settlement.

Whilst the objective – to balance residential with other forms of growth – is laudable, the Estate has serious concerns about how this approach will work in practice. The Estate therefore OBJECTS to this policy as currently worded. The current approach, of requiring a set amount of non residential development to come forward alongside each residential development, is arbitrary in nature and does not take any account of the realities of the individual location of development and/or the nature of any commercial demand. For example, where there is a demand for a commercial use, this might be of type which is not be suitable or appropriate for co-location with residential development, either as a matter of principle, or through competing technical requirements (for example, the need to provide safe vehicular access into the different uses). For these sorts of reasons, the current approach may well have the unintended effect of acting as a disincentive to landowners who might otherwise wish to bring forward residential schemes or residential which are otherwise appropriate and needed. This would serve to undermine the Plan’s wider objectives as expressed in, for example, the Vision.

We also note that draft Policy 5 has been drawn up in advance of the detailed economic evidence being provided to support the Plan and which is needed for its policies to be robustly justified.

As an alternative to the approach currently proposed, we would suggest that a more generic approach be applied whereby rural employment schemes can be brought forward subject to clear evidence of need, where they are proportionate in size to the settlement concerned and can be shown to address technical requirements in relation to matters such as highways and landscape impact. Such a criteria

led approach provides flexibility which also giving the Council the ability to control development and resist development which would be manifestly harmful.

Policy 20 (Exmouth)

This draft policy identifies the individual sites which are proposed for development in Exmouth. A number of different sites are identified.

As set out in our comments on draft Policy 1, the Estate strongly SUPPORTS the Plan's proposal to locate a substantial amount of new development at Exmouth given the town's size and sustainability attributes.

The Estate also strongly SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of the specific sites within Policy 20 and which it is the owner of. All of these sites are deliverable, suitable for development and well related to Exmouth's existing building up area. The Estate has been involved in promoting all these sites for development and has made submissions to the HELAA and GESP processes to the effect that they are willing to bring the site's forward for development.

The individual sites comprise:

- The Land at Douglas Gardens (reference Exmo 06) which is allocated for 44 homes. It will be recalled that a planning application for 44 homes was initially submitted and recommended for approval immediately prior to the adoption of the current local plan. Following supportive feedback from Council Members in 2022, a fresh planning application (reference 22/1954/MOUT) for 44 dwellings has been submitted and is under consideration. These schemes confirm that a development of the site is technically achievable and that the Estate remains committed to delivering high quality housing on the land including a substantial proportion of affordable dwellings. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.
- Littleham Fields (reference Exmo 08 and Exmo 16) which comprises two adjacent areas of land which are identified for 45 homes. This site is closely associated with the existing built up area and with other recent developments in the vicinity such as the Plumb Park scheme. The land is free of major constraints and is readily deliverable. For these reasons, it is wholly sensible for the land to be allocated for development in support of the wider approach of optimising the level of growth around Exmouth. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land;
- Land to the South of Littleham (Exmo 17). This is proposed for 410 homes and 1.6 hectares of employment land. This land is able to deliver a substantial amount of growth to Exmouth and

in a manner which would provide a number of benefits. In addition to be able to provide a sizeable amount of housing, development of this land would be well sited close to the existing employment areas at Liverton Business Park and at Dinan Way and would therefore be sustainability sited. Development of the land also offers the potential to provide road and none car connections between both the village of Littleham and Sandy Bay Holiday Park and thereby has the potential to help address traffic issues in the area. The allocation of the northern part of the land for employment use is sensible in that it would relate well to the existing Liverton Business Park and can help to provide balanced growth in the town. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.

- Land to the East of Liverton Business Park (Exmo 18). This is proposed for three hectares of employment use. This allocation will help the Estate to continue to deliver new jobs through its existing development of the Estate's adjacent Business Park. Notwithstanding our concerns, set out above, about the lack of settled evidence on the overall form of employment need, the location of Exmo 18 alongside existing and successful employment uses and its site adjacent to the most important town in the District strongly suggests that development of this land for employment can make an important contribution to the District's economy. The Estate therefore SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.

The Estate therefore SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of these sites for development.

Policy 25 (Development at Local Centres)

Policy 25 proposes the allocation of areas of land for housing development at locations at a number of different villages in the area. Amongst these are a number of areas of land which are owned by Clinton Devon Estates, namely:

- Budleigh Salterton: Land adjacent to Clyst Hayes (reference Budl 01) which is proposed for 50 homes.
- Budleigh Salterton: Land at Barn Lane (reference Budl 02 and Budl 03) which is proposed for 82 new homes.
- Woodbury: Land to the South of Broadway (Wood 16) which is proposed for 67 homes
- Woodbury: Land east of Town Lane (Wood 20) which is proposed for 28 homes.

The Estate strongly SUPPORTS the allocation of these areas of land for development. These areas of land are all deliverable as housing sites and are well related to the existing built up areas. The settlements of Budleigh Salterton and Woodbury are well provided with facilities. They are also locations where there is a strong need for a mixture of new housing including affordable housing which development of these areas of land would assist in the delivery of.

In relation to the Woodbury land (Wood 16), Land to the South of Broadway, a planning application has been submitted to the Council for up to 70 new homes on the land. The detailed technical work which has been undertaken to support the application demonstrates that housing development of the land is deliverable.

Policy 26 (Service Villages)

Under this policy, some limited growth is proposed at specific locations within a number of the settlements identified as 'Service Villages'. The Estate SUPPORTS the identification of land at the Service Villages for development. Some additional growth in these locations is important in that it will help support the vitality of these settlements, provide a much needed additional source of rural housing for local residents including affordable housing and diversify housing supply.

Amongst the areas of land which are proposed for development are a number of areas of land which are owned by Clinton Devon Estates namely:

- Exton: Land to the north east of Exton Farm (reference Wood 28) which is proposed for 33 dwellings. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.
- Otterton: Land east of Hayes Close (reference Otto 01) which is proposed for 10 new homes. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.
- Otterton: Land adjacent to North Star (reference Otto 2) which is proposed for 8 new homes. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.
- Otterton: Land at Hayes Lane (reference Otto 3) which is proposed for 5 new homes. The Estate SUPPORTS the proposed allocation of this land.

Exton's location close to Exeter and its good public transport access (having a railway station and good bus connections) means that it is suitable to accommodate some additional growth. Otterton, although in a more rural location, is also a sustainable settlement which contains a good range of facilities including a primary school, village shop and a public house, and is a village in considerable need of some carefully planned housing. Otterton is a location where there is particular problem with housing affordability and supply which some additional well designed housing will help to address.

The identified sites all represent infill locations and the use of these areas for housing is very unlikely to have any adverse impact on the character of the village or the AONB within which the village is located.

The Estate therefore strongly SUPPORTS the allocation of the identified land in Exton and Otterton for development.