

ACORN PROPERTY GROUP
REPRESENTATIONS ON THE EAST DEVON LOCAL PLAN (2020 – 2042) REGULATION 19
CONSULTATION DRAFT (MARCH 2025) BY BELL CORNWELL LLP

INTRODUCTION

Acorn Property Group is a very well-established, locally based housing developer and land promoter with interests across the district.

Acorn Property Group has helped to facilitate new homes, affordable housing and other uses in the area. They are an independent development and regeneration specialist that has, successfully created a range of residential-led refurbishment and new build schemes.

Specifically, Acorn Property Group has interests in land at Hillhead, Colyton, which is an allocated site in the Emerging Local Plan which is suitable for residential development.

Given the nature of their long-standing delivery of housing in the district, Acorn Property Group is an important local stakeholder within interests in the proposals in the East Devon Local Plan for future development in the district.

Against this background, Bell Cornwell LLP has reviewed the policies and information set out in the East Devon Local Plan (2020 -2042) Regulation 19 Consultation Draft and makes the following representations.

CHAPTER 13. OUR OUTSTANDING BIODIVERSITY AND GEODIVERSITY

Policy PB05: Biodiversity Net Gain

Strategic Policy PB05 requires that 20% biodiversity net gain (BNG) should be provided as part of all forms of major development. Where this level of provision is unviable, clear evidence to this effect needs to be provided, and the statutory 10% requirement needs to be met. Any off-site provision should be provided in the immediate locality of the proposed development.

The policy also stipulates that any development which is currently exempt from BNG will still be required to provide an ecological enhancement, commensurate to the scale of development involved.

Government guidance is clear that LPA's should only seek more than the statutory requirement of 10% where there is robust evidence and justification to do so, and this does not appear to have been presented within the LPA's evidence base.

Furthermore, the requirement to provide 20% BNG is extremely onerous and the Acorn Property Group OBJECTS to the policy as currently worded. Experience of the current, nationally mandated requirement to provide 10% BNG already demonstrates how difficult the process of delivering BNG is,

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with very high levels of bureaucracy and delay associated with the process. Furthermore, where the delivery of BNG cannot be delivered on site (and it does not appear that EDDC have tested whether all BNG requirements can be delivered on their allocated sites) the off-site costs of doing this are significant and can have a significant impact on viability.

Doubling this requirement to 20% is only likely to add to the complexity and degree of difficulty with achieving the required level of BNG and to act as a particular disincentive to the delivery of much needed development.

Acorn Property Group is of the view that this policy has not been positively prepared. BNG is already required to be delivered as a result of national legislation. Given that this requirement will remain and within the context of the concerns outlined above, we would suggest that this policy is unnecessary, unsound and should therefore amended to achieve 10% national requirements on major development.