

## **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.

The Estate has provided representations to the Council as part of previous consultations on the draft local plan and via the related call for sites process. They therefore have considerable interest in the policies and objectives as now set out in the current draft of the plan. On behalf of Clinton Devon Estates, we have therefore reviewed the plan and a number of observations on the policies are set out below.

### **Strategic Policy SE03: Farm diversification**

Strategic Policy SE03 sets out the Council's policy in relation to farm diversification proposals. Broadly, the policy seeks to allow new employment uses provided these require a rural location and are subordinate in nature to the wider farm use. To be acceptable, the policy requires that diversification proposals meet a number of tests:

Criterion A - the scheme should be an ancillary and subordinate elements of the overall farm use.

Criterion B - it should not prejudice the existing farm operation.

Criterion C – Any existing buildings should be used wherever possible. Other buildings which are derelict or offer no opportunity for beneficial use should be removed.

Criterion D – Any new building needed should be within or adjacent to an existing group of buildings.

## **Response**

For the reasons set out below and as currently worded, the policy is far too restrictive and will limit the ability of landowners to undertake reasonable farm diversification schemes. The Estate therefore OBJECTS to this policy in its current form.

Firstly, the policy requires that to be considered acceptable, proposed uses should need a rural location. This is unreasonable in that the range of uses which might be needed to allow the farm to diversify will be dictated by the location. It is reasonable for the policy to put in place measures to ensure that any diversification scheme is subordinate to the overall farm operation and in this regard

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other aspects of the policy, such as those within Criterion B, will help control the scale and impact of the diversification scheme relative to the overall farm operation. However, the very nature of diversification opportunities means that many will not necessarily require a rural location. This aspect of the policy is unduly restrictive and is likely to act as a deterrent to viable uses which might be otherwise well accommodated into the farm operation.

Criterion A of the policy requires not only that diversification proposals to be compatible with the farm operation but also to be ancillary to it. Again, this is far too restrictive. In land use terms, this would require that any proposal be directly linked to the existing farm operation. As mentioned above, whilst being subservient, many diversification proposals won't actually be subservient to the farm operation but distinct from it. Uses such as small scale employment, self storage or even food manufacturing may be entirely appropriate to the location but are unlikely to be considered ancillary to the existing farm business. Finally, it is a matter of interpretation as to whether the use in question would require a rural location. This stipulation therefore introduces a degree of ambiguity which is unlikely to be helpful to either applicants or the Council deciding how to apply the policy. This part of Policy SE03 should be therefore reworded.

Criterion C indicates that any redundant buildings which are not used as part of a diversification should be removed. This part of the policy is presumably aimed at helping schemes to deliver wider environmental improvements. However, we suggest that this requirement is too onerous. Other redundant buildings within the farm complex, including ones currently in disrepair, may have potential for reuse at some point in the future and in ways which might not currently be apparent. Requiring their removal as part of a diversification scheme has the potential to deprive the landowner of opportunities to reuse such buildings in the future and which, in so doing, would facilitate their restoration and improvement. This part of Policy SE03 should therefore be reworded.

Finally, Criterion D requires that any new buildings needed as part of the diversification scheme should be sited within or adjacent to an existing group of buildings. The requirement that such buildings be adjacent to the existing buildings is too onerous. There may be good operational reasons (noise, disturbance etc) why the proposed building cannot actually be adjacent to existing buildings. We would suggest that some additional flexibility be allowed to allow siting of buildings within the farm unit and this part of the policy should be reworded accordingly.

In light of the above concerns, we would suggest that the relevant parts of the policy should be reworded as follows:

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*“Farm diversification will be supported...where the development is subordinate to and supports the long-term financial viability of the farm...”*

*Criterion A. The proposal is compatible with, and be a subordinate component of, an existing and active farm enterprise...*

*Criterion C. Any existing suitable buildings are re-used or adapted.*

*Criterion D. Any new building (and parking and other structures/storage) is modest in scale and sited in or in close proximity to an existing group of buildings.”*