



Network Rail
1 Puddle Dock
London
EC4V 3DS

Via email: LocalPlan@eastdevon.gov.uk

26 January 2026

Dear Planning,

NETWORK RAIL RESPONSE TO EAST DEVON 2020-2042 LOCAL PLAN – SECOND REGULATION 19 PUBLICATION DRAFT

These representations are submitted to East Devon District Council ('the Council') by Network Rail Infrastructure Limited ('Network Rail'), in respect of the East Devon 2020-2042 Local Plan - Second Regulation 19 consultation ('the Local Plan').

On the path towards Great British Railways (GBR), Network Rail (NR) and South Western Railway (SWR) have formed the South Western Railway (SWR) which operates services through East Devon. Therefore, these representations should be considered as a joint railway covering the SWR route.

It is important that opportunities to promote the use of the railway as a more sustainable modes of transport are identified and taken forward. The railway network is a vital element of the country's economy and a key component in the drive to deliver the Government's sustainable agenda.

NR is the statutory undertaker for maintaining and operating railway infrastructure of England, Scotland, and Wales. As statutory undertaker, NR is under license from the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport Scotland (TS) and regulated by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to maintain and enhance the operational railway and its assets, ensuring the provision of a safe operational railway. As a matter of course, proponents of sites which are close to the railway boundary or sites which could affect the railway asset directly are required to engage with our Asset Protection and Optimisation team (ASPRO).

Representations

NR welcome the opportunity to comment on the changes proposed to the Local Plan and these are set out below.

Strategic Policy SP07: Delivery of infrastructure

In relation to the second station at Cranbrook, which has been ruled out. Funding set aside for the second station should be reallocated either to the Devon Metro scheme as a whole or specifically to improvements to Cranbrook station. It remains essential that CIL / S106 contributions to the Devon Metro are secured. NR supports that this remains a Priority 1 scheme in the latest Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) published as part of the consultation. NR continues to emphasise the importance of funding contributions towards securing larger funding packages. It is noted that there will be a separate IDP for Marlcombe.

Strategic Policy WS01: Development of Marlcombe new community east of Exeter

NR requires stronger policy wording to reflect the need for further funded rail enhancements to support the delivery of Marlcombe. The following wording is suggested to be included to make the draft Policy sound. This would be in addition to the proposed wording at 4b to 4f. This is considered necessary to make the draft Policy effective and to be consistent with national policy:

Rail service enhancements, integrated with local bus and active travel enhancements through the Devon Metro strategy, are expected to play a key part in delivering growth across the majority of East Devon, including Marlcombe, focusing on the Exeter – Waterloo and Exeter – Exmouth lines. Rail service frequencies achieved through infrastructure enhancements will enable a higher proportion of trips from Axminster, Honiton, Whimple / Feniton, Cranbrook and Pinhoe to be made by public transport rather than private car, both into Exeter itself and beyond (e.g. London and Plymouth). The Waterloo line enhancements to two trains per hour between Axminster and Exeter will help reduce traffic on the A30 corridor towards the M5 and Exeter, releasing capacity for the new town of Marlcombe and other development to the east of the city such as Honiton and Axminster, as well as enabling the completion of Cranbrook. Importantly the rail enhancements provide the required capacity improvements, particularly in peak periods such as travel to Exeter College, as well as enhanced frequencies.

Marlcombe offers a significant opportunity to create north – south bus and active travel links between Cranbrook and Digby and Sowton stations via the West End employment areas such as Skypark, the airport, Marlcombe itself and the development land north of Topsham, creating a local integrated network of key destinations that will improve connectivity for both existing communities and new developments.

The Exmouth line enhancements between Digby and Sowton and Exeter would create the second focal point in the integrated network with the opportunity to double frequencies to four trains per hour, creating an attractive turn up and go link from Marlcombe and the WS10 site into Exeter and down to Exmouth. This also releases capacity for the planned further growth at Exmouth.

As part of 'Wider Infrastructure' paragraph H, NR questions the role and purpose of the proposed park and ride site on the A30. This is duplicating, and potentially diluting, the role of the Devon Metro upgrades projecting a confused strategy which therefore risks future funding streams. Given the performance of the current park and ride sites at Sowton and Honiton Road sites it is questionable whether it would be viable with changed travel patterns. It is suggested that focus be given towards funding the Devon Metro as this would more actively promote sustainable travel. There is scope for 'Park and Rail' instead of 'Park and Bus' at suitable stations, taking account of future parking capacity at key stations such as Axminster. Digby and Sowton has potential for this role too given the location adjacent to Sowton. The southern park and ride serving the A3052

corridor has a stronger case given there is no realistic parallel rail corridor, though again its role relative to Digby and Sowton needs to be clearly defined.

Strategic Policy WS10: Development next to the M5 and north of Topsham

NR requires additional wording to the draft Policy to ensure that the full scope of rail connections are considered in the context of delivering the site. This would make the draft Policy sound and are considered necessary to make it effective and consistent with national policy. The following wording should be included with Part B of the Development and Infrastructure Delivery Framework:

B: A comprehensive transport strategy to prioritise active travel and public transport, *to include consideration of rail enhancements at Digby and Sowton to provide the required capacity to Exeter.*

Strategic Policy SD02: Axminster and its development allocations

Land east of Musbury Road (Axmi_02, Axmi_08 and Axmi_09)

NR supports the inclusion of securing public transport improvements within paragraph 1 of the draft Policy. Parking is however becoming an increasing challenge at the railway station despite active travel measures and will potentially need to be expanded within the lifetime of the plan, especially if there is significant development in adjacent areas such as Chard.

We would welcome a constructive dialogue with EDDC and adjacent landowners to explore options to achieve this and to make appropriate amendments to policies in the Local Plan if considered necessary to support this.

Strategic Policy SD03: Honiton and its development allocations

Sites Honi_18 and 39a/b

NR consider the following changes are required to make the draft Policy sound in respect of Honi_18 and 39a/b.

The allocation of these sites is welcome as they will stimulate rail demand as part of the Devon Metro vision. For this to take place however we would like to see a clearer requirement for good quality active travel routes linking the sites to the rail station. The current assumption for 39 a and b seems to be to use Northcote Hill / Monkton Road for active travel routes towards the station. Monkton Road is especially busy, as is the junction with High Street / Kings Road. It is challenging to see how this could be made an attractive and safe walking and cycling route. Consideration should be given to requiring the provision of a high-quality walking and cycling route between sites 39a/b and Honi_18. The route could potentially follow the railway and the tree line / stream up to Honi_18.

As noted in the policy for Honi_18 there would need to be an effective crossing of Kings Road giving access to Pine Park Road and the connecting pedestrian path to the station. A further pedestrian crossing should be considered on New Street near the railway bridge. This link would have the benefit of providing an improved route to the town centre and college.

Strategic Policy TR02: Protecting transport sites and routes

To ensure the full suite of rail improvements and opportunities are covered, the following is required to make the draft Policy sound. This would ensure the Policy is effective and compliant with national policy. The following wording should be added within the public transport section of the draft Policy:

- *Upgrades and related changes to stations, including but not limited to, additional and/or lengthened platforms, bridges and lifts.*

- *Improvements and mitigation to level crossings Axminster to Cranbrook inclusive*

Summary

Network Rail are keen to continue to work with the Council and other stakeholders in helping to deliver transport and infrastructure improvements for the benefit of residents of East Devon. We trust out comments above will be considered and amendments made to ensure the Plan is sound.

Kind regards,

Craig Hatton MRTPI
Senior Town Planner