

## Feedback from POW+R Group for the East Devon Draft Local Plan 2020-2040.

**As part of the Commonplace consultation we formerly advise you of our decisions in relation to the emerging plan.**

The guiding principles to POW+R Group (Protect our Whimble and Rockbeare Group) is the fundamental belief in self-determination for the citizens of the Parish of Whimble. In addition, the clear understanding of the principle of localism, following the Government's Localism Policy. The key concept within the Policy is that, *"power should be exercised at the lowest practical level - close to the people who are affected by decisions"*. The objective being to enable the entire Parish of Whimble to have a direct and strong say in the way the village and wider parish develops through the creation of a set of policies and community directed actions tailored to the demands, needs, concerns and desires of the local people.

This is being steered by the emerging Neighbourhood Plan which will be the principle tool by which Whimble will direct, promote and control development with regard to the built and natural environment. It will be focused on issues of sustainability and carbon reductions, and protecting the unique and special attributes of the Parish.

The plan is being prepared by Whimble Parish Council and the POW+R Group over the last two years. The evidence has been gathered in a series of public meetings, consultations and parish questionnaires, together with a Parish Survey undertaken in 2018.

In addition, it is important to note the current Government's agenda to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live and help communities, save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and determine proposed development applications.

It is therefore appropriate that, at this point in time, we provide the EDDC with what is considered acceptable and what is not acceptable.

It is understood the overarching policy of EDDC is to safeguard the rural countryside and coast and historic importance of the built environment. To ensure that each community and settlement in East Devon will retain its distinctive character. To

enhance its outstanding historic and natural environment which contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of its communities.

It is stated that the principal strategy will be geared to meeting local needs. Development should always be undertaken to minimise harm to the quality and character of the landscape.

### **Cobden Development of Cranbrook**

The Cranbrook Plan - Development Plan Document was adopted at a meeting of East Devon District Council on 19 October 2022. This now forms part of the development plan for the District, and sets out the future for development in the Cranbrook Area of East Devon to 2031.

In respect to the CB4 Cobdens Expansion Area, one of the four 'bolt on' estates to Cranbrook, comprising 71 hectares of land for residential development and associated mixed uses. Approximately this area will have 1495 new houses, of which 500 will be in the Parish of Whimble. It is therefore argued with evidence from surveys, post-it notes and statements from residents of the Whimble community that this provides an adequate contribution, from the Parish of Whimble, to the needs of housing in East Devon.

### **Green Wedges and Settlement Coalescence**

A significant factor of concern for residents of Whimble and Rockbeare is the potential results of 'creeping' development and threat of the coalescence of adjacent or neighbouring settlements, villages or towns. To prevent such coalescence, it is important that open land between settlements is retained thus helping them maintain their separate identities, their landscape settings and to avoid the creation of unrelieved development. This includes land separating the villages of Rockbeare and Whimble from the growing new town of Cranbrook, which also includes the distinct hamlets of Strete Raleigh and Hand and Pen.

For these reasons, development on the western flank of the Whimble Village would jeopardise the green wedge between Cranbrook and Whimble. Development of farmland & orchard rear of Bramley Close. Ref. LP\_Whim\_08 would be unacceptable.

Furthmore, sites LP\_Whim\_09, LP\_Whim\_18 and LP\_Whim\_20, would also be rejected as ribbon development between Whimble and Hand and Pen. Thus retaining open countryside on the southern side of the Village.

### **Green Belt**

Designation of land as Green Belt is applicable in creating Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. It is therefore appropriate to designate a green belt / green wedge to the west of Whimble and the urban sprawl of the New Town of Cranbrook, in line with the principle of the Green Belt and the avoidance of further 'ribbon development' on London Road.

## **Housing Needs**

It is accepted that there is an appreciation that villages will evolve and grow, however there is a strong desire to keep developments to less than 10 dwellings. The acceptance is to ensure conservation and enhancement of natural historic and built environmental. It is also on the proviso that the maximum number of new dwellings would be 10 dwellings per 5 years, up to 2040. There would be an expectation that 50% would be affordable.

In the details of the 'Local Plan' it states that development must be of the highest quality of built and natural environmental settings, whilst supporting the community's social well-being and respecting the intrinsic features that help define the character of the village. This will be emphasised in the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan, as will the areas of the village acceptable for small-scale developments.

## **Service Village**

It is appreciated that EDDC needs housing. How much housing is questionable and how the figures are derived is not clear. Within the Local Plan, it indicates that the village of Whimble is considered a service village. These are settlements with a potential for a number of homes, however the site indicated, being the 'Old Cricket Ground' / Memorial Land would not be acceptable and goes against the desire to accept small developments, of 10 or under dwellings. There are other options available, but not necessarily entire blocks of land.

## **Green Spaces**

Apart from the land that separates Cranbrook from Whimble, including all land to the east of Cobden Lane, there are a number of 'Green Spaces' in the village that have significant value for the environment and social and physical well-being.

Green spaces are important parts of the village, that can help us stay healthy and active. We are more likely to leave our homes, go outside and exercise, take pleasure in a peaceful setting, if there are pleasant places to go, with parkland and trees. These include, Whimble Cricket and Football Club ground, the Pump Track, the Village Field, Slewton Crescent Play Park and land adjacent to Elizabeth Close, as well as the Richard Whiteway Memorial Land – east of Slewton Crescent. All these areas should be accessible to the public and where possible be enhanced with trees and plants. It is important to stress, that there is a significant body of evidence, supporting the view that the 'Memorial Land' should be retained as 'Green Space', preferably with public access. In addition, it has been previously designated as, land of local landscape and historic importance.

It is for these reasons that development on the 'Memorial Land' would be unacceptable, especially LP\_Whim\_11.

### **6.3 Orchard**

The village of Whimble has long been associated with the Cider industry since the early 1800. The arrival of the railway in 1890 made Whimble a main supply hub for the products of our orchards. Whiteway's became the most successful Cider producers in the world. Many of Whimble's families have connections with the old cider factory, orchards and other industries that supported the same. It is appreciated that in the late 1980's there was a decline in the popularity of cider. After this many of the traditional orchards were 'grubbed up' and returned to farmland.

Whimble village still has a large number of hectares of orchards in the parish. It is of the utmost importance that the remaining orchards are preserved as part of our agricultural and social heritage and also to protect the wide diversity of wildlife, flora and fauna that now live and flourish in these distinct environments.

Orchard ridges, a characteristic of Whimble orchards, can help to strengthen historic character, and locations of former orchards. Ridges from former orchards may survive as parallel linear earthwork banks; these should be reused rather than levelled. There are new smaller varieties of apple and pear trees, which have been planted in more recent years. Orchards are a vital part of Whimble's rural landscape and rich heritage.

### **Other Matters**

According to the Environment Agency, there are a number of areas of the village liable to flooding. Any significant village growth would damage the fragile infrastructure of surface water drainage and sewage treatment. The development of 500 priorities, within the Parish of Whimble, as part of the Cobdens Estate will have a major impact on the capabilities of the drainage system in the basin of the River Clyst.

The rural lanes in all directions from the village centre, have a considerable number of single-track elements. The village is not designed to cope with a large influx of traffic.

There are minimum employment opportunities within the parish and therefore any sizable increase in population would necessitate car usage to work destinations. It could be argued that further development enhances Whimble as a dormitory village of Exeter. Accordingly, further 'excessive' development would contravene policy statements on green issues and carbon reduction.

Excessive development would add further pressure on Whimble School and Doctor's Surgery.

## **Summary**

The POW+R Group seeks to support plans with the aim of providing a delicate balance between economic growth, providing opportunities for affordable accommodation for all residents, and retaining the area's distinctive rural character. The aim is for modest and sensitive new growth in the parish which must be sympathetically designed and located so that it blends with the existing settlement, taking into account the constraints presented.

The Key element refers back to the principles of localism and that the Neighbourhood Plan is the best way to determine new development sites.

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2023