

Date: 23 August 2024
Direct phone: 01395 517546
Direct email: democraticservices@eastdevon.gov.uk
todd.olive@eastdevon.gov.uk
Our ref: SPC/TPch



Dear Chair

I write to provide an update on the production of East Devon District Council's new Local Plan. By way of introduction for those who I have not yet met, I am East Devon's Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, charged with oversight of the Local Plan and our wider planning service.

Firstly, I'd like to extend sincerest thanks both personally and on behalf of the authority to all of our Town and Parish Councils who have sent representation to our Local Plan Working Group meetings over the past two months to share your local knowledge and insights into potential development sites throughout the district. While some of those conversations have inevitably not been easy, members of the Working Group and officers from our Planning Policy Team have benefitted significantly from being able to hear your perspective – and we hope in turn that your representatives might have taken away some understanding of the difficulties we face district-wide with finding acceptable sites for new development.

As has been trailed, we are now moving into the decision-making phase of the site selection process – and with some urgency. The government's proposed changes to the NPPF and the so-called 'standard method' for calculating housing numbers, together with its potential 28% uplift in East Devon's housing requirement, include a very short window of opportunity for East Devon to move forward with its current draft and largely on the 'old' housing numbers – provided we are able to publish a completed draft of the Local Plan within one month of the new NPPF being published. This will be before the end of the year, but could be anytime from late October or early November. Our intended schedule for some time has been to publish the plan in December, and we are confident it is achievable, but if we are to meet this slightly accelerated timetable then we must move quickly.

In our view, the alternative – planning to proceed under the new system and with the higher numbers – will require substantial changes in the way that we plan for development, both locally and on a larger scale. While we are fully supportive in particular of the government's desire to see a step-change in affordable housing provision, and are proactively working to ensure that new large-scale development in the district is delivered to an exemplary standard that avoids some of the pitfalls of a purely commercially-led approach that we have seen in recent history, we are clear that this would need to come hand-in-hand with substantial

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Blackdown House, Border Road,
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Honiton, EX14 1EJ
DX 48808 Honiton

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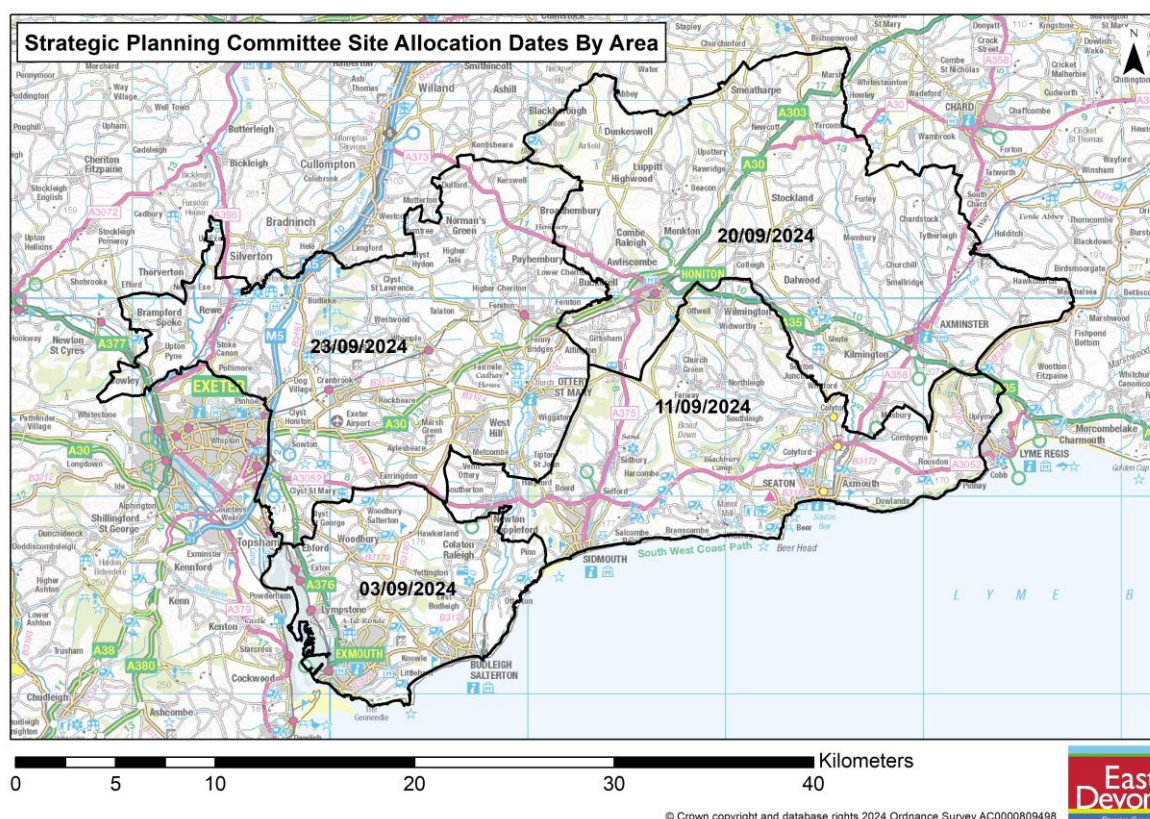
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Chief Executive: Tracy Hendren

devolution of powers, and funding, from Westminster. Under the current system, meeting these higher targets would be impossible for East Devon to achieve without compromising our crumbling infrastructure and fragile natural environment.

To move us through the site selection process, over the course of the next month or so, East Devon's Strategic Planning Committee will be considering officers' final recommendations regarding site allocations for both housing and employment use. These recommendations will reflect extensive technical work undertaken by our team and subject specialists, as well as the public consultations that have been undertaken and comments at Local Plan Working Group meetings – and wherever possible will show explicitly how we have taken account of and responses to those consultations.

For the first time at East Devon, we will be taking each and every site allocation decision in meetings fully open to the public, with reserved time for public participation and input from East Devon ward members as well as towns and parish councils on every potential allocation. We are hopeful that this transparent and democratic approach to the process will provide a robust platform for our Town and Parish Councils, and for residents, to make clear their views. While this timetable is subject to change should any sessions run over or need to be revisited, we are currently anticipating sessions of Strategic Planning Committee to address decisions in the different areas of the district on separate dates as follows:



September 3rd:
Exmouth, Lymington,
Woodbury, Exton (AM)
Budleigh Salterton, East
Budleigh, Otterton (PM)

September 11th:
Sidmouth, Newton
Popleford (AM)
Seaton, Colyton, Beer,
Branscombe, Uplyme (PM)

20th September:
Honiton, Gittisham,
Dunkeswell, Upottery (AM)
Axminster, Hawkchurch,
Musbury, Kilminster (PM)

23rd September:
Strategic West End Sites,
Broadclyst, Clyst St Mary,
West Clyst, Whimble (AM)
Ottery St Mary, Tipton St
John, West Hill, Feniton,
Payhembury, Plymtree,
Broadhembury (PM)

All of these meetings will be fully streamed via YouTube as normal, while arrangements for registering to speak will be detailed on the relevant agenda – available on our website. While we will be making our own comms efforts, we would appreciate any assistance you are able to provide in communicating these details to residents through your own channels to ensure we are facilitating democratic public participation. Details can be shared from our newsletters and social media.

We know many of these discussions will be difficult, and inevitably decisions will have to be taken that will not be popular or ideal in a perfect world. In the context of a persistent housing affordability crisis recognised in national policy, and with very real potential for government intervention should we refuse to make these difficult decisions, we have little choice but to push on and make the 'least worst' choices that we can – while doing our utmost to pursue more affordable homes for our residents, and to deliver on wider plan objectives around green spaces and biodiversity, decarbonisation, and job creation. To reassure you all, we will be making clear representations to government regarding the constraints of our district and our desperate need for more funding for critical infrastructure – and we will not be alone on this.

We hope that you will all continue to engage with this important process, and I look forward to meeting many of you and your colleagues at Strategic Planning Committee in the coming weeks.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Todd Olive', with a stylized, cursive script.

Cllr Todd Olive
Portfolio Holder – Strategic Planning