

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL
JOINT PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

Barum Room - Brynsworthy

Friday, 18 July 2025 - 10.00 am

PRESENT

Councillor M Prowse (Chair)

Councillor R Hicks (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

North Devon Council:

Councillors Coombs, Maddocks and Walker

Torrige District Council:

Councillors Hames, Hodson, James and Tinsley.

Officers:

North Devon Council: Chief Executive (KM), Senior Planning Policy Officer (ED) and Planning Policy Officer (MA)

Torrige District Council: Head of Communities & Place (SK), Planning Manager (HS), Planning Policy Team Leader (IR), and Solicitor (SD)

Also Present:

Councillor Lock (TDC) attending remotely

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Worden, Councillor Cottle-Hunkin (who appointed Councillor Tinsley as her substitute), Councillor Lock attended remotely but had appointed Councillor Leather as her sub to attend in person. Councillor Leather did not attend.

57. TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 FEBRUARY 2025

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th February 2025 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

58. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE MEETING AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

There were no items brought forward by the Chair for discussion.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced.

60. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

The Committee considered a report by the Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) regarding the Local Plan Review Progress (circulated previously).

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) advised the Committee of the following:

- The report was an update on the progress of the new Local Plan, plus a project plan of the work streams needed prior to the formal start of the Local Plan (expected to be in October 2025).
- The timetables showed the formal start as October 2025, with the adoption of the plan scheduled for July 2028.

The local plan regulations associated with the Levelling Up Regeneration Act were yet to be published. This could create further requirements to adhere to. Table 2 provided details of the potential stages of the preparation of the Local Plan, based on the current planning system.

In the absence of the government publishing the necessary regulations, table3 provided details of the workstreams which would be undertaken before the formal start of the new plan. It provided confirmation that every project was currently being worked on, apart from two elements: Neighbourhood Priority Statements, and the Strategic Viability Assessment.

Further information provided included:

- The draft vision would be published in October 2025 at the time of the new Local Plan launch.
- Works would include Settlement Hierarchy assessments – to establish what individual settlements had to offer and their role with other settlements. Liaison with parishes was on-going.
- New Government guidance was expected in relation to Neighbourhood Priority Statements. To date the guidance was being interpreted in the same way as it was with the previous Local Plan.
- The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) was due to be published at the end of July 2025. The works had been completed and it was being prepared for publication.
- 663 sites had been considered as part of the HELAA. This included 319 new sites which all been visited.
- The two authorities were not presently able to demonstrate at Five-year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS).

In answer to questions from the Committee, the Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) confirmed that:

- The HELAA was an evidence document, rather than establishing policy.
- The Authorities were soon to launch a 'call' for new sites which could be included in the Local Plan.
- Government Funding for Town and Parish Councils towards their Neighbourhood Plans had been withdrawn. At this stage it was noted that it was assumed that the local Neighbourhood Plans were still going ahead. These could still be submitted to the Local Authorities.
- There was no indication from central government that they would be withdrawing Neighbourhood Plans.

In answer to questions from the Committee, the Planning Policy Team Leader (TDC) confirmed that:

- Sites could be included in the 5YHLS at the stage when permission was granted – they did not have to wait to be included until they were being built. There needed to be realistic evidence-based assessments of what was 'deliverable'.
- There were sites nationally where the developers were struggling to get registered housing providers on-board, although this appeared to now be improving.
- The Government had concerns over uncommitted s106 affordable housing nationally.

The TDC Planning Manager advised the Committee that in appeals received since the loss of the 5YHLS there had been mention of the level of shortfall in the 5YHLS, identifying it as only being modest and slight, and that therefore additional housing supply was not being necessarily afforded the same weigh as it would have had the shortfall been greater.

The Committee Members were advised that the next round of Thematic Working Group meetings had been set up for the members and that these groups would potentially meet regularly over the coming year to look at the issues being faced.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

61. INFRASTRUCTURE AND MONITORING

The Committee considered a report by the Planning Policy Team Leader (TDC): Understanding the delivery of infrastructure and addressing housing need (circulated previously).

The Planning Policy Team Leader (TDC) presented the report and reconfirmed the following points:

- Housing delivery would need to be part of sustainable development, creating balanced communities and that housing should be the 'right type, in the right place'.
- Policies ST23 and DM10 were intended to ensure all development made a contribution towards meeting needs for infrastructure.
- There had been a great amount of engagement with infrastructure providers during the preparation of the existing local plan.
- Modelling of transport improvements had been undertaken – this had included closer examination of the Westleigh Junction (on A39).
- Both Councils had invested in systems and processed that would provide detailed and refined data regarding the scale and types of housing delivered across northern Devon.
- The teams intend to look backwards to the previous plan to enable them to set baselines for the new Local Plan, and to review what has worked or assess what could be done differently in the delivery of housing.
- TDC have detailed data on housing development covering the past 10 years on a plot-by-plot basis. NDC have site by site data and were working towards having data similar to TDC available, currently seeking to resource the work required.
- There was a desire to start engagement early with infrastructure providers to support the new local plan, given the importance placed upon it by communities and to deliver sustainable development.
- Good connections had already been established with infrastructure organisations.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Planning Policy Team Leader advised:

- There had been consultation with Highways during the preparation of the previous plan which resulted in junction improvements and upgrades being identified.
- GP surgeries had been contacted in order to assess need during the preparation of the adopted local plan – eg for expansion/s106 – there had been no appetite from those contacted.
- Developer contributions towards Northam GP Surgery had been collected and would provide funding for expansion – with planning permission granted for an extension. .
- Growth had been planned to support infrastructure – for example it had been hoped that the 'place making' in Northam would have proved attractive to public transport services, although, to date, none had set up additional bus routes to those areas.
- Initial stages of the work did involve having those conversations with utility services (including public transport providers) in order to provide foundations for good development.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1) endorsed the proposals for research and monitoring in relation to infrastructure provision and housing need; and

- 2) acknowledged the commencement of early stakeholder engagement in relation to infrastructure provision

62. PLANNING CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The Committee considered a report by the Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) regarding the Planning Consultation Responses (circulated previously).

The Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) advised that:

- the report covered the responses given by the two authorities in relation to the follow consultations:
 - Planning Reform Working Paper: Speeding up build-out
 - Technical Consultation on implementing measures to improve Build-out transparency
 - Planning Reform Working Paper: Reforming Site Thresholds
- There were also two further consultation responses, yet to be submitted, on:
 - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Improvements
 - Planning Reform Working Paper

The Planning Policy Team Leader advised that there were proposals relating to BNG to:

- introduce a 'Medium' category of site (with 10-49 dwellings) in order to ease the BNG requirements for SME builders.
- to introduce a single-dwelling category – rather than just 'single builds' for self-builders.

Councillor James and Councillor Hodson confirm that the responses provided to the consultations were representative of the opinions of those present at the briefing sessions.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

63. EXCLUSIONS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS AND RESTRICTIONS OF DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended from time to time), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
- (b) That, all documents and reports relating to the item be confirmed as "Not for Publication".

64. OPPORTUNITY FOR LAND ACQUISITION

The Committee considered a report by the Senior Planning Policy Officer (NDC) regarding the Opportunity for Land Acquisition (circulated previously).

The Committee considered the implications of acquiring sites – with regards to:

- infrastructure – including access and proximity to services
- Compliance with National Policy
- Closer working with Devon County Council

RECOMMENDED that North Devon Council and Torridge District Council consider the principle of the purchase as recommended in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified

Chair:

Date: