

Plymouth and S.W. Devon Joint Local Plan

The draft JLP has now been published and a consultation process will take place between 15th March and 26 April 2017. Comments are to be made to the Inspector and should focus on 'soundness and legal requirements'.

I have queried this with WDBC, because as far as I can see, there has been no opportunity to comment on the substance of the draft plan itself, only on a document setting out the scope of the JLP and seeking views on specific issues.

I have reviewed this 300 page document, looking for issues that affect either the parish or the preparation of MACKPlan. As far as the latter is concerned, there are a few changes to wording that need to be made and possibly a section on community-owned green energy, but other than that the draft questionnaire does not need alteration.

Although Our Plan was to be replaced by the JLP, it was apparently approved in December 2015 as a corporate document and 'sits alongside the JLP'. What that means and what's in the adopted version of Our Plan I have yet to be establish.

Development policies for sustainable villages

There are no surprises here; Milton Abbot is a sustainable village, Chillaton is not. Milton Abbot will have an indicative housing figure of 20 new homes over the life of the JLP, Chillaton has none. Lifton is a key village and will get 100 new homes and 14,400sq m. of employment space. It provides local facilities to other nearby communities, thereby supporting a local network that helps justify the sustainability of new homes in places like Milton Abbot that do not have the full range of necessary facilities.

When MACKPlan identifies sites for new homes, it will have to demonstrate that it has had regard to any potential impact on the Tamar Valley AONB. Any new homes identified in MACKPlan will also need to reflect the character of Milton Abbot.

Of interest to both Chillaton and Milton Abbot is that the characteristics of sustainable communities include being accessible and walkable, particularly in terms of social interaction in village centres.

There will be a consultation paper on potential changes to current settlement boundaries. Housing and employment development adjoining or very near to an existing settlement will only be supported where it meets the essential development needs of the local community and does so in a sustainable way.

All residential developments of 6 to 10 homes will provide an off-site contribution to deliver affordable housing equivalent to 30% of the homes in the scheme concerned. Schemes with 11 or more houses will provide 30% affordable housing on-site.

The change of use of post offices, pubs, etc. will only be supported if there is no significant harm to the level of service locally and there is no reasonable prospect of the business/community use continuing. This still seems weaker than the provisions in previous local plans and was something the PC objected to in Our Plan. We could argue that this policy should be about preventing change of use

unless specific conditions regarding efforts to sell the business have been demonstrated to have been unsuccessful. Supporting change if it's reasonable is not the same, especially as reasonableness is a subjective test.

Landscape protection

There are the usual values attached to areas that have a statutorily protected status and various policies contain statements about the need to ensure that development in the countryside does not have an inappropriate impact and contributes to a sustainable and beautiful countryside.

Around Plymouth there will be the ability to designate strategic landscape areas that have an increased sensitivity to development due to their proximity to a protected landscape. There are no such facilities for West Devon or South Hams. It makes sense to create that protection where needed around Plymouth, because of the high numbers of new houses to be built there. Could it be argued that our landscape, sandwiched between the TV AONB and the DNP is also in need of protection because of its proximity to protected landscape[s]?

Renewable energy/low carbon emissions

There are policies setting out requirements for developments to incorporate low carbon emission designs and for the inclusion of RE generation facilities. It's not clear how much of this is mandatory or 'expected', but it's difficult to see whether any more provision could be demanded, without studying the latest provisions of the NPPF. Perhaps this is something that should be left until the outcome of the MACKPlan survey is known and then, if needed, further research could be done on this issue.

One specific requirement is that wind turbines can only be built on sites designated for the purpose in neighbourhood plans.

Community energy schemes will also be supported and we will probably need to amend the MACKPlan survey to cover this issue more fully.

Howard Asbridge
1st March 2017.