2. BACKGROUND

DEVON TODAY

2.1 Devon is one of the largest counties in England and this is reflected in the diversity of its scenery, economy, environment and settlement pattern. This Structure Plan Review has been prepared against this background of diversity and the need to ensure that the distinctive qualities and assets of Devon are conserved for future generations.

2.2 We do not live in a static society, however, and the County is also affected by pressures for change - pressure for new development, pressure for improved services and infrastructure, pressure from those wishing to come into the County to live, work or holiday.

Its Environment

2.3 Devon has a varied environment - with its long coastlines, the high moorlands of Dartmoor and Exmoor, extensive open countryside, historic towns and major urban areas. This environment is characterised not only by variety but also a quality recognised by a whole range of international, national and local designations; these seek to ensure that the most valued areas are effectively conserved.

2.4 Most of Devon’s environment is affected by human activity. Controlling this process of change, is one of the primary roles of the planning system. This Review ensures that major change that will inevitably occur in the future does so in a way that does not diminish the overall environmental quality of the County.

Map 2: Relief Map of Devon
Its People

2.5 More than one million people now live in Devon and the total population has been increasing each year. Many thousands move into Devon every year and, while some also leave, there is a net inflow of population which offsets the excess of deaths over births in the resident population. The population is not uniformly spread and the relatively densely populated areas in the south and south east contrast with the much lower densities found in much of northern and central Devon, in Dartmoor and Exmoor.

The more densely populated areas have experienced the greatest increases in population, and some of the more remote rural areas of Devon have experienced periods of population decline.

2.6 Devon includes three main urban areas, and together they accommodate about half of the total population in the Plan area. Plymouth, with a quarter of a million people, is the largest urban area in the South West, west of Bristol. Torbay and Exeter are also major population centres. Other towns, such as Barnstaple and Newton Abbot, act as focal points for the surrounding area. There are important market towns which have developed to serve the rural areas and coastal settlements that function as a result of the tourism resorts. Map 3 illustrates the 1991 distribution of urban population throughout the County.

Its Resources

2.9 The increasing population and changes in economic activity have put pressure on the resources and infrastructure available to support them. Devon has important natural assets which need to be conserved:- agricultural land, mineral deposits, the coasts and landscapes, etc. - but these are also assets whose stewardship directly supports the County's economic well being.

2.10 The physical infrastructure of the county represents a resource that needs to be enhanced. Social, educational and other facilities have had to cope with increasing demands from the population. It has become increasingly expensive to ensure the maintenance of services for those living in the remoter parts of the County.

2.11 New investment has taken place in the transport networks with improved road links - both internal routes and those connecting to the national network. Despite this investment, increased car ownership and usage has resulted in more congestion and pollution, not only in the main urban areas but, increasingly, in the countryside.

2.12 The role of public transport is valuable as the environmental and capacity problems associated with private transport increase. The rail network is less extensive than in the past but continues to be an important element. The potential for rail in the future, in the overall communications network serving the County, also offers opportunities for direct European links to the region.

2.13 A number of ports, serve the County, most notably Plymouth and Teignmouth, which cater for freight and/or passenger movements. The main airports at Exeter and
Plymouth are making an increasing contribution to the accessibility of Devon to other parts of the UK and Europe.

PAST PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT

Past Patterns of Change 1981 to 1991
2.14 Using Census data and information from Local Authorities, it is possible to establish the general patterns of development within the County over recent years. From 1981 to 1991, approximately 60,000 dwellings and 325 hectares of employment land were developed in Devon.
2.15 During this 10-year period, approximately 75% of all dwelling completions and 85% of employment land were located within or adjacent to main settlements. Plymouth and Exeter accounted for 25% of all dwellings completed and 45% of all employment land. Map 4 illustrates the increase in dwelling stock 1981 to 1991.

Map 4: Increase in Dwelling Stock 1981 to 1991

Relationship to other areas
2.16 Devon needs to be seen in the context of other parts of the Region, the rest of the UK and other regions in Europe. A wider global context is increasingly important in environmental and economic terms.
2.17 In the European context, Devon lies in a relatively peripheral location, sharing a number of characteristics with other regions lying along the Atlantic Seaboard. Closer integration within the European Union has emphasised the importance of inter-regional links and the future development of the area will be closely affected by European policy initiatives reflecting this ‘Atlantic Arc’ identity. Devon is aiming to be more closely linked with Europe’s core areas (see Map 5), but this would require substantial resources for improved infrastructure provision.
2.18 Within the national context, the South West Region as a whole has been relatively successful in developing its economy and coping with economic recession; this has not been the case in the western part of the Region. The northern and north western parts of Devon, in particular, are relatively remote from the main economic centres of the UK and have significant economic difficulties.

EUROPEAN POLICY

2.21 European policy is making a direct contribution to the future planning of Devon. This impact stems from Spatial Planning, Transport and environmental legislation. European regulations and directives and funding initiatives make them effective. Policy statements are also prepared in the European Union’s joint political and administrative structures, in which our Government plays its full part.

Cornwall and Devon Brussels Office
2.22 The European Union aims towards developing the economy of peripheral regions and social progress. Key aspects are sustainable growth respecting the environment, and raising the standard of living and quality of life in member states. The free movement of capital, people, industry and services within the Union has made peripheral regions such as Devon increasingly sensitive to economic development in other, possibly more advantaged, parts of Europe.
2.23 Special measures have been brought forward to address particular problems within the European Union. For example, the European Social Fund aims to assist
people in adapting to industrial and production changes, to increase geographical and occupational mobility and to redress disadvantage among underprivileged groups. The European Regional Development Fund is intended to help redress the main regional imbalances within the Union by assisting with structural change in regions whose development is lagging behind.

2.24 Particular problems areas within the Union are tackled through a series of European Objectives drawn up by the Commission:

**Objective 1:** helps growth or adjustments in less developed regions to integrate them fully into the European Economic Area.

**Objective 2:** addresses the needs of declining industrial regions.

**Objective 3:** helps remedy long term unemployment.

**Objective 4:** helps young people into jobs.

**Objective 5:** helps agriculture and rural development adjust to reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. Objective 5b assists regeneration in rural areas suffering from decline.

2.25 In Devon, Objective 2 applies in and around Plymouth, Objectives 3 and 4 apply throughout Devon and Objective 5b applies in many rural areas of northern, southern and western Devon and also to the southern half of Torbay.

2.26 To assist activities in designated rural areas, a European initiative LEADER II is available to fund small scale projects in four areas of Devon - North Tamar, Torridge, Greater Exmoor and South Devon/Torridge.

2.27 The current Objectives have been revised and the new ones will apply to the newly qualifying areas from January 2000, although existing but transitional arrangements will continue in areas losing eligibility for some time.

**EUROPEAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE (ESDP)**

2.28 At the Europe-wide level The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) takes up key aspects raised in previous guidance documents (EUROPE 2000 and EUROPE 2000+) and sets out the Spatial components jointly agreed by European Environment Ministers, which National Governments need to take into account in their planning systems. The ESDP refers to the increasingly competitive economic world climate facing all parts of the Union, the enlargement to the East, and the need to safeguard the environment and biodiversity through sustainable development and the conservation of resources. The document raises issues such as regional access being poor in areas like Devon and that increasing development pressures arise as a result of attractiveness and migration.

2.29 The Atlantic Arc region. Devon lies within the Atlantic Arc Region of Europe and shares much of its peripherality, rurality, reliance on primary and defence industries, low incomes, lack of job opportunities and seasonal employment. The peripheral nature of the Atlantic Arc is reflected in the relative isolation of most areas from access to major transport networks. Maritime transport is not as well developed as it could be, and ports are often small, unspecialised and poorly connected to the extensive combined transport systems now being developed in Europe as a whole. Both road and rail links with the ports are generally poor. Air links are limited by restricted destinations and frequency due to competition from established airlines at major airports outside the region. Devon has also been included in the core EU North Western Metropolitan Region so could benefit from co-operation in European initiatives linked to this area.

2.30 Several sectors of the economy in this part of the European Union are in decline, e.g. agriculture, fishing, mining, metallurgical industries, shipbuilding, defence industry, traditional tourism and other manufacturing activities. Also, in the Atlantic Arc, the economy is particularly reliant on public expenditure, the service industry and on seasonal employment.

**National Policy Guidance**

2.31 National Policy Guidance is set out in the form of specific legislation, Planning Policy Guidance Notes, Minerals Planning Guidance Notes and Circulars which usually relate to particular topic areas and are subject to regular modification. As part of the preparation of this Review, all the current Guidance Notes and other statements of Government policy have been assessed to ensure that the Review addresses all the policy issues and Government guidance identified.

**Regional Planning Guidance for the South West**

2.32 The current Regional Planning Guidance for the South West published in July 1994 set out a number of broad regional objectives. These are:

- to safeguard and enhance the distinctiveness and diversity of the environment
- to encourage and maintain a diverse and healthy economy
- to secure a sustainable level of growth and distribution of development
- to provide a framework for the provision of infrastructure and services so as to ensure an enhanced quality of life
- to provide for a safe and efficient transport system to serve existing and future needs.
Map 5: European and Regional Context
2.33 The Regional Guidance added a regional dimension to the consideration of development patterns in Devon. It included some general principles relating to the broad patterns of growth that should be favoured within the area. In particular, it advised that more concentrated patterns of development that would lead to the bulk of new development being located within the main cities and towns, would be consistent with Government policy and with sustainable development objectives.

2.34 In this context, the Regional Guidance identified Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay as main urban areas within the region; areas that could therefore accommodate major growth. But it recognised that not all urban areas may be capable of accommodating major new development. In such cases, nearby towns may be better placed to accommodate development - and in certain circumstances new settlements may also be appropriate.

2.35 In contrast, it urged that less concentrated development patterns should be discouraged and that new development in rural areas should be strictly controlled. Scattered settlement patterns, which are inconsistent with the aims of sustainability, should not be reinforced. It commented however that there was a need to identify those settlements most suitable to accommodate growth - especially those which act as service centres for a wider surrounding area, have good communications and a degree of local self-containment.

2.36 The Guidance recognised the development strategy for Devon cannot be considered in isolation from that being proposed for Cornwall, particularly in terms of the future development of Plymouth and its hinterland. The Guidance referred specifically to the need to undertake a joint study of the Plymouth sub-region, and such a study was initiated by the relevant local authorities in the area including both Devon and Cornwall County Councils. The Structure Plan Authorities in Devon have sought to reflect the technical findings of that study within this Review.

ISSUES TO BE FACED IN THE FUTURE

2.37 The previous section of this Chapter illustrates, the need to preserve and enhance the County’s environment and act in a responsible way regarding the use and management of resources, whilst also needing to respond to the pressures for new development.

2.38 The Report ‘Devon to 2011 - The Issues’, published in December 1993, highlighted four key areas of concern to be addressed as part of the Structure Plan Review - how to accommodate change, especially new development; how to conserve the local and global environment; how to promote the development of the economy; and how to develop the transportation network.

2.39 These areas of concern can be seen in the context of the pressures affecting the County; pressures arising from:

♦ continuing net inward migration and population growth;
♦ changes in key sectors of the economy such as defence, agriculture and tourism;
♦ increasing demands for mobility and accessibility; and
♦ a lack of resources for investment in new infrastructure.

2.40 In order to address the key areas of concern and respond to these pressures, there is a need for a broad vision of how we would like to see Devon in the future.