

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper New Communities and Strategic Urban Extensions¹



[This briefing paper refers to all planned 'new communities' including free-standing new settlements, semi-independent settlements and urban extensions of existing towns and cities. The term 'new community' emphasises the need to create a community rather than just a physical settlement]

Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents. To view this, and other briefing papers, see <http://www.devon.gov.uk/ldf-briefing-papers> For more information or comment contact 01392 382275 or email environment@devon.gov.uk

Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents:

Incorporation in LDFs

1. LDFs which propose large-scale, self-sufficient new communities and urban extensions as a way to meet identified housing and employment needs should take forward the new community policies in the adopted Devon Structure Plan (2001-16) and the RSS for the South West (2006-26), tailoring them to the specific local context.
2. Where new communities are proposed by LPAs, the LDF Core Strategy should contain an overarching new community policy, including the new community as an important element of the overall 'spatial vision' for the district.
3. A Site-Specific Area Action Plan (AAP) should then outline the new community proposals in more detail, showing the new community vision, its context, history, development objectives, likely infrastructure requirements, phasing, mechanisms for monitoring and implementation. It should also include a detailed proposals map showing the new community and where possible an initial masterplan. Where appropriate an SPD may also prove helpful in this regard.
4. LDFs should advocate the use of design coding and pre-application discussions as a means to delivering high-quality sustainable communities within a streamlined planning process.

Sustainable Communities

5. The LDF Core Strategy should state that New Communities should have the clear aim of being exemplar mixed-use sustainable communities in accordance with the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. They should be focused on people's needs, be flexible and adaptable and complement (revitalised) urban areas.
6. Any New Community proposals should seek to implement the government's sustainable development objectives by integrating social, environmental and economic objectives (the 'three pillars' in a balanced, holistic way. Promoters of new communities should provide:
 - A) A comprehensive masterplan
 - B) An agreed phasing programme which delivers social, community, environmental and transport infrastructure in phase with (or prior to) residential and employment development
 - C) A series of strategies (e.g. design, sport and recreation, transport, landscape and biodiversity, drainage, housing, employment, infrastructure and utilities, phasing, sustainability) addressing key issues and setting clear targets and commitments
 - D) Action plans that show how these strategies and the proposals within them will be delivered, enforced, monitored and managed

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E) Technical studies to support the proposals (e.g. a Transport Assessment, a Sustainability Appraisal, a Sustainability Checklist, a Retail Impact Assessment, an Environmental Impact Assessment, a Public Transport Study, a Health Impact Assessment)

Key Characteristics

7. LDFs should require new communities to have the following key characteristics:

- A) An appropriate mix of housing of different types and tenures, including affordable housing
- B) Flexibility to respond and adapt to changing needs and demands
- C) Renewable energy, recycling, waste, water and energy efficiency measures
- D) Distinct identity and character, avoiding coalescence with existing settlements
- E) Integrated mix of different land uses within a compact, medium to high density urban form
- F) Transport strategy based on a sustainable hierarchy of modes and travel planning
- G) Shared surface residential streets and 'walkable neighbourhoods'
- H) Efficient use of land, prioritising the re-use of previously developed land
 - I) A design based on sustainable urbanism principles
- J) A vibrant commercial town centre with a diversity of retail and employment opportunities
- K) Substantial social and community infrastructure and governance
- L) Mechanisms for using the unearned increment to finance infrastructure and services
- M) Necessary critical population mass to support a diverse range of services and facilities
- N) Strategic design guidance (in the form of a town design code) and more detailed design guidance for each phase and/or area (in the form of detailed design codes)
- O) Designed in a manner which allows for further development ('future-proofing')

Sustainability

- 8. New community proposals should set clear benchmarks for sustainability (e.g. EcoHomes/ BREEAM Excellent, Level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes) based on robust criteria, and an agreement for them to be constantly updated and reviewed as best-practice evolves.
- 9. New community proposals should be designed in a way which focuses on people and their changing needs, recognising their potential to deliver wider health, well-being, social cohesion and sustainability benefits. For example, LPAs should be requiring promoters of new communities to demonstrate a multi-dimensional approach to travel planning, to provide a health impact assessment, a demographic assessment, to work with the local Police Architectural Liaison Officer to design out crime and with other stakeholders to design buildings for Lifetime use and wheelchair access.

Coordinated Development

- 10. LPAs advocating new community proposals in their LDFs would benefit greatly from taking a coordinated approach to strategy development and setting up working groups to help produce detailed strategies, assessments and a masterplan prior to a planning application being submitted.
- 11. LDFs should encourage a clear, transparent process of community consultation and involvement in new community proposals, ensuring community ownership for the plans. In particular, consultation with hard-to-reach groups within the local area should be a key priority and will often need to be the subject of more targeted consultation events (e.g. a Young People's Planning Day).

Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing any new community/urban extension proposals with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be fully involved in any discussion relating to them, using its experience in the Sherford and Cranbrook new community proposals.

1. Introduction

The scope of this briefing paper is to bring to the attention of Local Planning Authorities the need to take forward Devon's existing new community proposals at Sherford and Cranbrook into LDFs and consider future new communities and sustainable urban extensions as a way of meeting growing housing need and demand in a more sustainable manner. This is in accordance with a growing view (e.g. TCPA, 2000; 2005), that a wave of people-focused new communities that reinvigorate Ebenezer Howard's Garden City ideals and learn from the New Towns Movement are part of resolving the UK's current housing shortages. The rationale being that concentrating development into a separate new community enables the necessary land value uplift to provide the full array of infrastructure and services the community needs in a sustainable way. Similarly there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the 'compact city approach' is neither feasible, sustainable nor desirable – lack of brownfield sites, town cramming and counter to well-established residential and employment decentralisation trends. The Government's Sustainable Communities Plan, its recent consultation paper on PPS3 and the submitted version of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (2006-2026) suggest a far more positive stance towards 'new communities' and greenfield development than in the past.

The population of Devon has been growing at a rate of 4,400 per annum (1994-2004) and is expected to continue at this rate over the next 15 years. Alongside wages below the national average, low rates of housebuilding, exceptionally high house prices² and a high level of in-migration, this creates major issues of affordability. The current RSS for the South West anticipates a much higher level of housing provision than the previous RPG10 with significant long-term implications for the development of new communities/urban extensions. The RSS has carried forward the conclusions of the Devon Structure Plan EIP Panels of 1997 and 2003, that two semi-independent new communities are the most sustainable way to meet the housing and employment needs of the Exeter and Plymouth sub-regions.

2. Delivering Sustainable New Communities

Devon Structure Plan and Regional Spatial Strategy Requirements

The detailed proposals for two new communities (Proposals ST8 and ST12), and the more general new community policies in the adopted Devon Structure Plan (2001-16) (Proposals ST23, ST24 and ST25) should be incorporated into LDFs which propose self-contained new communities as a sustainable way to meet local housing needs and demand. This is even more important for LDFs to consider given that the RSS for the South West is expecting the enlargement of the existing two new community proposals for Devon and a more positive attitude to future new community proposals. RSS Policy SR35 is expecting Sherford to deliver 5,500 dwellings by 2026, Policy SR16 is expecting Cranbrook to deliver 6,500 dwellings by 2026 and for a second new community of Exeter to provide at least 1500 dwellings and 20 hectares of employment land by 2026. Both Proposal ST8 and ST12 emphasised the need to plan for the future expansion of Sherford and Cranbrook (future-proofing) and this should be appropriately incorporated into LDFs.

The New Community Concept

Self-contained, semi-independent new communities provide an outstanding opportunity to deliver a truly sustainable development form that encourages the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles. These semi-independent communities must be planned in a comprehensive and coordinated way, providing a complimentary function to revitalised urban centres³ (e.g. Plymouth) creating the resource those centres need to grow⁴ and helping resolve the housing and employment needs of the wider travel-to-work area. The aim should be to put Ebenezer Howard's Garden City ideals into practice in a modern context, learning from the lessons of the past (e.g. the New Towns, monofunctional suburban housing) and adapting those lessons to the local context. The term 'new community' emphasises the need for the developers of new

² Average house prices in Devon have increased by 131% between 1999 and 2004, compared to a national average in England of 54%.

³ Demonstrating the growing functional interdependencies between cities and their wider hinterlands

⁴ Nick Raynsford MP in 1999 stated that Devon's New Communities were 'distinct, compact new neighbourhoods close to and with good links with the cities concerned'

settlements to pay sufficient regard to social and psychological factors (e.g. community governance), and for all stakeholders to embrace the 'sustainable community' vision.

Sustainable Communities

Devon County Council's vision is for new community proposals to have the overarching aim of being exemplar '**sustainable communities**' that challenge the conventional approach to urban development. These are "*communities that can stand on their own feet and adapt to the changing demands of modern life. Places where people want to live and will continue to want to live*". Creating sustainable communities should be a priority for all LPAs and new community proposals provide an excellent opportunity to deliver this priority, putting the principles of sustainable development into practice, making it more locally meaningful and people-focused.

Housing Needs

In order to be socially inclusive, mixed communities, new communities must provide an appropriate mix of housing of different types and tenures including provision for affordable housing that is 'tenure blind' and scattered throughout the settlement in small clusters. This wide choice of housing types for both affordable and market housing helps to create more inclusive communities ensuring access for all to a safe, affordable home which is suited to their needs and located in a community where they want to live.

Mixed Uses

The lessons of 1980s mono functional housing developments are that an appropriate balance and synergy between housing and employment provision, providing mixed land uses and attracting a genuine social mix are critical components of delivering sustainable communities. New communities should be designed to be compact, mixed-use settlements of human scale, with a distinct identity and with sufficiently high densities so that residents can meet their basic needs within walking distance of their homes.

Phasing

New communities must be planned in a manner which ensures that a comprehensive range of infrastructure is provided either before or at least in tandem with residential development. It is the phasing of housing, employment, transport, governance, cultural, sporting, recreational, environmental, social and educational infrastructure which is essential to the sustainability and self-sufficiency of the settlement and each phase of its development.

Sustainable Transport Provision and Travel Planning

One of the most important elements of creating sustainable new communities is the provision of high quality, high frequency public transport from the earliest days into nearby towns and cities. Promoters of new communities will need to clearly demonstrate how they are prioritising the needs of cyclists and pedestrians in accordance with the hierarchy of modes outlined in PPG13, the Department for Transport's draft Manual for Streets and Policy TR7 of the adopted Devon Structure Plan (2001-16). The masterplan should clearly be designed around the needs of walking and cycling, followed by public transport and then the private car. Only through this 'hierarchy' will residents adopt sustainable travel behaviour patterns and a more sustainable development be achieved. Devon County Council would strongly encourage LPAs to require new community proposals to design their residential streets as 'shared surfaces' where people can walk, rest and play without intimidation or dominance by motor vehicles, facilitating both community cohesion and sustainable lifestyles.

Alongside this hierarchy, LDFs should require the developers of new communities to provide a range of travel planning initiatives, which could include the provision of 'welcome packs' that give transport/travel advice for all site users, a car club, a travel plan coordinator, a web-based travel resource, a 'travel forum', a town travel plan, and an individual travel planning service for residents and business occupiers. Sustainable travel plans and facilities (e.g. showers, changing facilities) should be provided for all major trip-generating uses, including schools, workplaces and health centres.

Community Involvement

Designing the new community in a manner which ensures it provides benefits for local residents is key to creating local 'buy-in' to its legitimacy and sustainability. The experience of Sherford and Cranbrook has shown the importance of involving all sections of the local community in the planning of new communities at the earliest stage. Indeed the term 'community' begins with the essential notion that people should be

involved in shaping their own environment. There should also therefore be measures taken to ensure new residents feel part of a community from when they arrive (e.g. a community website) and that appropriate governance arrangements are in place (e.g. town council, parish council or community trust).

Exemplar Design

A key element of delivering new communities is the use of design coding which ensures high quality development and certainty in the planning process. However, experience has shown that design codes' operation and implementation requires careful consideration. At both Cranbrook and Sherford, Devon County Council is working with the developers and local authorities on creating an overall masterplan, a town code (or strategic design guidance) and detailed design codes. The aim is to develop new communities that reflect a comprehensive masterplanning approach in accordance with Policy F of the draft RSS. The designs of the new community, its spaces and buildings must be appropriate to an exemplar sustainable community (e.g. safe cycle routes to schools, embedded renewable energy technologies) building on best-practice in the UK and Europe.

Strategy Development

LDFs should require that any new community proposals provide strategies on a range of detailed issues (e.g. housing, employment, transport etc). These must be approved by the LPA as a collective package prior to planning approval and be a condition of the Section 106 Agreement. At Cranbrook and Sherford working groups of local authority officers, DCC and external partners are discussing and agreeing the different strategies with the developers. This coordinated approach is essential to delivering a new community.

Size

LDFs should address the critical issues of the 'size' of a new settlement as this has a fundamental impact on its sustainability, self-containment and self-sufficiency⁵. It takes a lot of time and money to build up the necessary **population mass** to support the facilities and services required to achieve relative self-containment. Similarly, if provision is being made for expansion of the new community beyond the plan period, the designs, proposals and infrastructure requirements need to be future-proofed to avoid incremental growth and unplanned sprawl.

Sustainability

Any new community proposals must be based around the need to deliver more sustainable development, addressing the three pillars of sustainable development in an integrated way. Any new community proposals should seek to set a benchmark for sustainability standards both in terms of sustainable construction (e.g. EcoHomes Excellent), renewable energy generation, social sustainability and economic sustainability (e.g. vocational training opportunities).

3. Key Issues to Address

Key Issues to be addressed by LDFs include:

- **Meeting the government's 'decent home for everyone' objective** in an area with a strong environmental protection lobby, high house prices and low average wages.
- Developing new greenfield communities is counter to **the government's interpretation of sustainable development** as reusing previously developed land in existing urban areas
- New communities on greenfield sites are highly **politically contentious**, they are **more visible** than other urban forms, and thus attract more local opposition
- **Funding up-front infrastructure** requirements, addressing the infrastructure deficit and finding appropriate mechanisms for the community to benefit as a result of granting planning permission.
- **Commercial Viability**
- Providing a **legible urban form** whilst also complying with Secure by Design principles

⁵ The UK Government (1998) and Breheny et al (2003, para 12) consider that 5,000 dwellings was the minimum threshold required for a new settlement to function as a 'community'.

- Achieving **EcoHomes/BREEAM Excellent** when Housing Corporation funding is only to EcoHomes Very Good, DfES funding is only to BREEAM Very Good, compliance with the Code for Sustainable Homes is voluntary, it is not required under building regulations and the housebuilding industry is sceptical both in terms of its viability and deliverability.
- New communities and urban extensions are frequently characterised by a more youthful demographic mix than surrounding settlements. Therefore LDFs must specifically address how new communities and urban extensions will attract a **genuine social mix**.
- **Phasing** of housing provision that combines commercial triggers, sustainability aspirations and the need for a genuine social mix throughout the build period.
- **Higher residential densities** – the draft RSS for the South West has a policy (Policy H2) that states that sustainable urban extensions in the South West should have an average dwelling density of 50 dwellings per hectare or more.
- Delivering and funding a sufficient mix of **affordable housing** in perpetuity, that is indistinguishable from market housing, pepper potted throughout the site and meets local need
- **Persuading a conservatist housebuilding industry** to commit to building ‘sustainable communities’ and taking a long-term approach rather than the short-term rewards of building isolated car-oriented housing developments in suburban locations.
- **Encouraging a partnership, interactive approach** between all the key stakeholders, partners and local organisations.

In addressing these key issues for new communities, Devon County Council would like to work in partnership with LPAs and other stakeholders to secure the best outcomes and the delivery of exemplar sustainable communities in an efficient way. Devon County Council would like to be involved in LPAs’ application and interpretation of emerging RSS and adopted Structure Plan policies in their LDFs.

4. The Content of LDFs

It is often difficult to establish a clear demarcation between where the different aspects of policies and principles regarding new communities should lie in LDFs (i.e. in Core Strategies, LDDs or SPDs). However, the overall aim must be to achieve the principles outlined in Section 2 – delivering new communities that set new standards of sustainable development, planned for in a comprehensive, co-ordinated, partnership-driven and integrated way with clear mechanisms for monitoring the process and learning from it. We would suggest the following:

a) **Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy should set out the integrated approach to New Communities including:

1. An overarching strategic objective to improve the well-being of local people, and in particular to provide affordable homes and job opportunities to meet the needs of local communities
2. Outline how the new community fits into the Spatial Strategy for the district
3. Identify general components of the proposal (e.g. education provision, high quality public transport)
4. Include details about the New Community in appropriate sections (e.g. housing, employment)
5. Demonstrate the LPA’s interpretation of RSS and Structure Plan New Community Policies
6. Include the market and affordable housing targets provided by the new community in the LPA’s overall housing targets.
7. A Spatial Vision which includes the need to deliver the sustainable development of the new community
8. A separate section about the new community and which strategic objectives it contributes to.

This should briefly set out:

- a) Why the new community is needed (i.e. its rationale and purpose)

- b) The opportunity this scale of development represents
- c) Why it represents a sustainable pattern of growth and the alternatives considered
- d) Synergies with other major strategic developments
- e) The current position with regards to the new community (e.g. planning application, masterplan, strategies produced, stakeholders involved)
- f) General objectives (e.g. balanced, mixed community with full range of supporting infrastructure)
- g) How cross-boundary issues are being addressed

b) Other Local Development Documents

A separate Area Action Plan [AAP] should be developed for the new community, which provides detailed, site specific proposals. It should develop the Core Strategy and may set out:

1. A concise, easily comprehensible vision
2. Development objectives and principles
3. The history and policy context (e.g. consultation exercises, EIPs, learning from past mistakes etc)
4. Site boundaries and location
5. A key diagram of the new community and its surrounding locality
6. A masterplan and phasing programme
7. Details of the new community proposals under a series of topic headings (e.g. sustainable development, urban design and design coding, housing, environment, transport, community infrastructure, energy, governance, economic development, landscape, drainage, biodiversity).
8. Infrastructure and service requirements
9. A synopsis of technical work, studies and surveys used as an evidence base
10. A framework for delivering the planning application and the vision engendered in the AAP, including a timetable for delivery and any viability issues
11. A monitoring and review framework

Key Devon Structure Plan Policies

- ST1: Sustainable Development
- ST8: Sherford New Community Proposal
- ST12: East Devon New Community Proposal
- ST23: Concept of New Community Development
- ST24: New Community Implementation
- ST25: New Community Landscape Setting

References

- JSPAs (2004) Devon Structure Plan (2001-16), Adopted October 2004.
- Planning Policy Statement 3 Consultation
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/pub/97/ConsultationPaperonNewPlanningPolicyStatement3PPS3HousingPDF523Kb_id1162097.pdf
- Planning Gain Supplement Consultation
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/F59/D3/pbr05_planninggain_449.pdf
- Consultation on Code for Sustainable Homes
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162094>
- SWRA (2006) Consultation Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (2006-2026), June 2006.
<http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/media/SWRA/RSS%20Documents/Final%20Draft/drafttrssfull.pdf>
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Definition of Sustainable Community:

The key requirements of a Sustainable Community are:

- ❖ **A flourishing local economy**
- ❖ **Effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and business**
- ❖ **An active voluntary and community sector**
- ❖ **Sufficient size, scale and density to support basic amenities**
- ❖ **Good public transport and other transport infrastructure within the community and to urban, rural and regional centres**
- ❖ **A well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures**
- ❖ **Good quality local public services, health care and community facilities**
- ❖ **A diverse, vibrant and creative local culture**
- ❖ **Links with the wider community**
- ❖ **Encourages all to embrace the sustainable community vision**