

54/S27/Mod 54/S2

54/UF1/Mod 54/UFMAP/Mod

From: Local Plan Review
Subject: FW: Uffculme Parish Council
Attachments: UPC Consultation Response - Feb 2017.pdf; 2015 Local Plan Response.pdf

From: Verity Aldridge [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 February 2017 21:32
To: Local Plan Review
Subject: Uffculme Parish Council

Dear Sirs

Please find attached Uffculme Parish Council's response to the consultation of the Local Plan.

Please note both of the attached documents form part of our response.

Please acknowledge receipt.

Regards

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Uffculme Parish Council
Local Plan Review 2013 – 2033
Proposed Submission – February 2017

1. Introduction:

- 1.1. Uffculme Parish Council presents its comments in respect of the revised local plan that will be presented to the Secretary of State for Review.
- 1.2. Uffculme Parish Council wishes to attend and participate in the Public Inquiry of the Local Plan.
- 1.3. Uffculme Parish Council considers that the Local Plan, as drafted, is **UNSOUND**.
- 1.4. The decision to include land at J27 appears to have been an afterthought and rushed through without proper analysis, consideration and consultation. The decision appears to have been made as a result of continual pressure from one developer and its business associates.
- 1.5. Uffculme Parish Council submitted a response in April 2015 to the then proposed submission of the Plan. At this point Uffculme Parish Council set out their opposition to any development on land adjacent to M5/J27. At this time, Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) rejected the proposed inclusion of land at J27 and this was not included in the Local Plan.
- 1.6. In our previous submission, we also stated we felt that development of Uffculme should be of a minor nature due to the pressure already on local services.
- 1.7. Uffculme Parish Council representatives, along with local residents, have attended many of the MDDC meetings where the Local Plan was an agenda item and presented questions to the Council; many of these remain unanswered.

2. Proposed modifications – Land at J27:

- 2.1. Uffculme Parish Council considers the inclusion of land at Junction 27 to be **UNSOUND** because it is linked directly with a specific developer, its transition from initially not including the land at J27 in the plan, to including the land and setting out a very specific proposal for development.
- 2.2. Uffculme Parish Council attended the meeting of MDDC on 22 September 2016. Prior to the meeting, we were reminded that the meeting was to discuss the land allocation, rather than any proposal for use of the land. We passed on this requirement to all those Parishioners that were attending and this was respected. However, as the meeting progressed, it seemed that this distinction appeared not to apply to the MDDC Officer, who presented a very-long, detailed explanation of her report, which included maps and literature that had been taken from marketing materials prepared by Eden Westward for their proposal for use of this parcel of land. There were many local residents that contacted the Parish Council following this meeting to ascertain whether this was in fact correct procedure. Unfortunately, at this point the agreement had been made for the land allocation. The meeting should have been about allocating land, and not about promoting a specific proposal by a private developer.
- 2.3. The allocation of land, as agreed at the September 2016 MDDC meeting, prescribes the use of the land on a very narrow basis which only allows for the development set out by Eden Westward – all other land

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allocations within the Local Plan give detail of the broad use and area for land included, however, the land at J27 includes specific uses. Please see examples below of where a broad description has been used:

2.3.1. Policy CU18, Venn Farm refers to “12,000 square meters of employment land”

2.3.2. Policy CU1, North West Cullompton refers to “10,000 square metres commercial floor space to include a care home or retirement complex, and other suitable uses such as a hotel or leisure development”

2.4. However, the policy for the land at J27 details:

2.4.1. Travel Hub (7ha) – Motorway/roadside services; electric car hub; hotel.

2.4.2. Agronomy Visitor Centre (9ha) – exhibition space and hall, gallery; research and education space; regional visitor centre and hotel. The Agronomy centre will include up to 1,000 square metres of ancillary retail.

2.4.3. Outdoor Adventure Zone (6ha) – Surf lake/lagoon; beach; high ropes adventure area.

2.4.4. Outlet Shopping Village (6ha) - Designer outlet shopping centre retailing controlled goods comprising discontinued/end-of-range lines, seconds and surplus/sample stock. The Outlet Shopping Village to include up to 14,000 square metres of controlled comparison goods and up to 2,000 square metres of A3 uses.

2.4.5. Publication Stage Policies Map of Junction 27 shows a large complete area shaded in blue as being the area for proposed commercial allocation. However, MDDC is fully aware that this land will not all be available for development of any kind. MDDC therefore invited Eden Westward to prepare a revised map showing how they would envisage their plan, this was displayed during the meeting in September 2016 which shows that MDDC were looking to allocate the land specifically for the use of Eden Westward.

2.5. It is obvious to Parish Council that the above detail for the specific land allocation at J27 has been taken directly from the proposal prepared by Eden Westward who wish to develop this land.

2.6. Uffculme Parish Council maintains that by including these very specific details MDDC is showing the close relationship that has been formed between Eden Westward, the proposed developer and MDDC. This appears to be predetermination on the part of MDDC in favour of one particular developer.

2.7. MDDC has also published a lot of literature alongside the Local Plan that has been prepared for Eden Westward as part of the Local Plan which had been prepared by Nathan Lichfield and Partners:

2.7.1. Critique of Retail & Leisure Statement

2.7.2. Addendum to Critique of Retail & Leisure Statement March 2016

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2.7.3. Additional Retail Response July 2016

- 2.8.** MDDC have continually referred to 'Eden Westward' in their reports and literature demonstrating an inappropriate and unprofessional relationship.
- 2.9.** Publication Stage Policies Map of Junction 27 shows a large complete area shaded in blue as being the area for proposed commercial allocation. However, MDDC is fully aware that this land will not all be available for development of any kind. MDDC therefore invited Eden Westward to prepare a revised map showing how they would envisage their plan, this was displayed during the meeting in September 2016 which shows that MDDC were looking to allocate the land specifically for the use of Eden Westward.
- 2.10.** The 'Addendum to Critique of Retail and Leisure Statement – March 2016' refers on Page 22 that the whole proposal has to be linked due to the financial reliance that the 'Ark' has on the Designer Outlet Village. It states that without the designer outlet village the 'Ark' is not viable. Uffculme Parish Council is concerned that MDDC is willing to support the development of a 'tourist attraction' that would not be financially sustainable on its own. The report also refers to the need for public interest to be compelling. Uffculme Parish Council, along with many other parish councils in the area, are strongly opposed to this development and the detrimental impact that it will have on our rural villages.
- 2.11.** The same report, 'Addendum to Critique of Retail and Leisure Statement – March 2016' states at point 5.4 that "We do not believe that sufficient evidence has been presented to demonstrate the DOV (Designer Outlet Village) or employment uses should be included within a plan allocation as required enabling development." Points 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 further demonstrate that the proposal needs significant subsidy to operate. It also specifically refers to the heavy reliance of the Eden Project in Cornwall on charitable donations and grant funding. Again, the parish Council are concerned that if the proposal cannot stand on its own merits and subsequent partial or complete closure would result in dereliction and loss of agricultural land and the potential reliance on external funding.
- 2.12.** Uffculme Parish Council is also concerned that Eden Westward had previously included within their plans a large distribution centre on land adjacent to the area included on the Publication Stage Policies Map. However, this was withdrawn within the last 12 months. It had previously been well advertised that the distribution centre would be a funding source to deal with the loss-making tourist attraction. Furthermore Uffculme Parish Council are concerned that when the project fails, the proposal for a retail distribution centre, having no benefit to local people, will be resurrected.
- 2.13.** Uffculme Parish Council is aware that there is an existing planning application on the land at J27 to build an extended Motorway Service Area. Uffculme Parish Council would support the development of a service area that was to a sensible scale and provided more suitable services to people on their journeys, as under the previous planning application.
- 2.14.** MDDC considers that by allocating land at J27 for a retail outlet it will not negatively affect the towns within Mid Devon. Uffculme Parish Council cannot understand this principle. The designer outlet, along with the ancillary retail and A3 (restaurants, snack bars, cafes) will mean that less people will visit the traditional, independent cafes and shops within our town centres. MDDC's own commissioned study concluded that the existing commercial centres in the district would be negatively impacted by this

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development. The significant housing development in Cullompton and Tiverton in recent years has had a regressive effect on the town centres, with more shops closing than opening.

- 2.15. Policy S2 states that development is to “be concentrated at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton.” The development targets set out allocate 10% of housing development in rural areas, with the majority focused around Tiverton and Cullompton. However, the proportions of commercial development is not allocated on the same scale. The allocation of commercial space to rural areas is in fact 20% of the total. In excess of 17,000 sqm of commercial space will be allocated to the land at J27 alone, that is one site that has over 10% of MDDC’s planned commercial space. The majority of the land is a greenfield site and with vast development at Cullompton and J28, some 4 miles away, it appears that there is a strong focus of commercial development in one corner of the MDDC District. Crediton has relatively low development targets considering its very close proximity to Exeter and the new Crediton Link Road that is being built. It appears that the focus is with land on the M5, Junctions 27 and 28.

3. Housing

- 3.1. The latest draft of the local plan, as drafted, includes provision for 60 houses on land West of the village of Uffculme that was absent from earlier drafts. This allocation of land for housing development was a direct result of MDDC’s putting the plan on hold, for so called, technical rewriting. The land was granted permission at Appeal in April 2016, on the grounds of MDDC’s lack of a 5-year housing supply.
- 3.2. Uffculme, while a relatively large village, is now being extended as a result of the permission that was granted at Appeal for the Land West of Harvesters. The Publication Stage Policies Map needed to be amended to reflect this. The change now means that the ‘Waste Management Facility’ is now not shown, despite its close proximity to the village.
- 3.3. The land also extends into the floodplain identified on the map.
- 3.4. There are plenty of other prospective housing applications in the area as a result of the decision on the land at Harvesters, but local people do not want further development. They choose to live in Devon for its rural situation.
- 3.5. Uffculme Parish Council also has concerns about the proposed allocation under Policy SP2 to build 60 houses at Higher Town in Sampford Peverell, as a direct result of including the land at J27 in the Plan.

4. Devon Minerals Plan

- 4.1. The Devon Minerals Plan was agreed by an Inspector in October 2016 and will be fully adopted by DCC in February 2017. The Minerals Plan includes provision for future quarrying at Penslade Cross, land North East of J27. The Plan provides for the HGV vehicles that will use the quarry to use J27. The proposed site will provide quarrying for decades into the future, the site is approximately 40 hectares.

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- 4.2. The cumulative impact of a large quarry and the development of J27 will have a significant impact on local people and the local area, however, the Policy on the Plan does not at any point refer to the Minerals plan, the locality of its site being close to the development site. Uffculme Parish Council is concerned that MDDC have not taken into account impact on the land and the suitability of the land allocation sufficiently. Uffculme Parish Council require an assurance that MDDC have taken account of the cumulative effect of such extra traffic when making any land allocation at J7.

5. Consultation period

- 5.1. Uffculme Parish Council understands that MDDC had set, specific consultation periods. Uffculme Parish Council tried to submit copies of letters between a Parishioner and our local MP, Neil Parish, these were rejected by MDDC. However, it seems that MDDC has bowed under the pressure of the constant and significantly funded marketing appraisal of the Eden Westward proposal.
- 5.2. Uffculme Parish Council also has concerns that the delay in this consultation period and that MDDC will not review, acknowledge or comment on the submissions made. MDDC agreed the 'Revised Local Plan' at a meeting of the Council on 21 November 2016, however, they have delayed the public consultation period to commence some 6 weeks later.

6. Previous submission

- 6.1. Uffculme Parish Council made a submission on the plan in April 2015 and I attach this response to this document.

MID DEVON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2013 – 2033

PROPOSED SUBMISSION CONSULTATION

RESPONSE BY UFFCULME PARISH COUNCIL

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Uffculme Parish Council

March 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Uffculme Parish Council (UPC) contends that the Mid Devon Pre-Submission Local Plan, as published, is sound in principle, has been positively prepared based on independent assessments of need and adopts a flexible approach in both the provision and allocation of land to satisfy those needs.
- Its justification is that it promotes sustainable development on the main centres of population, the market towns, with particular emphasis on the regeneration of Cullompton that is clearly identified as the strategic focus for development in the medium to long term.
- Its effectiveness is measured by provision over and above the assessed need both in housing and employment land allocation and, in addition, addresses some of the current planning deficiencies in mid-Devon in relation to infrastructure, transport, air quality and protection of the environment.
- It is consistent with policies detailed in the NPPF in that the proposals are sustainable in relation to objectively assessed need, consequential site selection, a town centre focus and enhancement and protection of mid-Devon's rural character and environment.
- In addition to the independent technical advice gathered on both need and demand, it also takes into account local representations to achieve appropriate development in mid-Devon. It has not been unduly influenced by the spectre of opportunist speculative development that would be alien to the impression that mid-Devon gives both to residents and visitors and that is embodied within the natural character of the district.
- UPC is very supportive of the Plan and its policies and, in particular, the strategic focus on Cullompton as a growth point during the Plan period. Cullompton Town Council is actively promoting Cullompton East in order to fulfil its objectives to provide and underpin the regeneration of the town centre and the development of a successful and vibrant community market town that will enhance mid-Devon district.
- UPC remains totally opposed to any development adjacent to J27/M5. A detailed discussion of the issues that would arise is given in a separate section of this response. It warmly welcomes the rejection by Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) of any form of development at this location.
- UPC considers that development at Uffculme should only be of a minor nature within the existing settlement limits. The village currently suffers from a chronic lack of infrastructure provision and its access roads are substandard with inherent dangers.

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VISION/SPATIAL STRATEGY

- The Vision of the Plan is admirable but many aspects are totally outside the planning powers and 'enabling' roles available to the District Council. e.g. How can MDDC "provide decent homes that people can afford" when reality is high house prices and a relatively low wage economy resulting in a lack of affordability..... "A good range of opportunities to travel by active and sustainable modes" is unlikely to result given a background of further reductions in support for bus services and limited train travel. Travel by car will remain dominant in Mid Devon and it is to MDDC's credit that the Plan attempts to partially address this issue by concentrating growth on the existing areas of population, the market towns, which have reasonable public transport links.
- The emphasis on achieving lively and successful town centres is welcomed, respecting at the same time effects on its near neighbours including Exeter and Taunton. Out of town development is quite correctly rejected; development that would not only harm town centres and neighbours but would increase motor vehicle travel to unacceptable levels and destroy the countryside.
- The Plan's commitment that restricts development in the villages and countryside demonstrates the Council's adherence to the ethos and character of the district. It is noted (1.16) that "the possibility of a new settlement in the vicinity of Willand/J27 was examined but found to be inappropriate and likely to be unachievable". Likewise, commercial/retail/leisure at J27, where a case for development in open countryside was not proven.
- UPC generally supports the Vision and Spatial Strategy contained in the Plan and, in particular, the medium to long term policy of Cullompton being the strategic focus of new development in the Culm Valley (S1 – S11 – CU1 to 21).

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC POLICIES

- The overall provisions for Housing and Employment have been based on independent technical advice on the levels of need and demand for development in Mid-Devon and are supported. Based on the SHMA, ELR and RS, these levels reflect 'normal' employment and 'natural' population growth projections.
- **Housing** – (S2, S3, S4) – The assessed requirement is 7,200 dwellings within the 20 year plan period, 50% of which is to be provided at Cullompton as the focus for medium/long term growth. In an approach to be commended a further 10% (628) is provided in the Plan and, in addition, three contingency sites with availability for 270 dwellings. By focusing housing development on the main towns existing infrastructure can be updated and utilised, and new infrastructure provided, through developer contributions. This also protects rural areas from undesirable over-development. The excess housing provision will add flexibility to housing delivery and ensure that the Council can continue to demonstrate a five year land supply requirement in accord with national policy. All the sites allocated in the Plan have been subject to the SHLAA and all considered deliverable.

- Nationally, levels of house building/completions have fallen short of targets in recent years and currently all the political parties are promising substantial increases as polling day draws ever closer. However, if there was an easy solution to the problem of lack of homes then the problem would not exist. Virtually all housing provision is through the private sector and it is in developer's interests to manage supply, maintaining price levels, and often restricting affordable housing on 'viability' grounds. It simply is not in their interest to flood the market with homes. In Mid-Devon, as elsewhere, there is a significant demand for affordable housing but even the Plan accepts (2.28) that 'the level of supply is unlikely to meet the anticipated need' even factoring a 27% level within the housing calculations. The public/private split that was seen in the 1960/70s will never return and the housing shortage is likely to remain a permanent feature. The shortfall in housing provision largely results from a skewed market.
- At any one time around 500-600 dwellings are on the market for private sale in the mid-Devon district, a level that more than satisfies local need. What is needed are affordable homes and rental properties, but the District Council has no influence on the total numbers, as it can grant planning consent but not enforce build, and has only a limited influence on the housing mix.
- Employment – (S2, S6) – Commercial targets have been similarly assessed and a level of 154000 sq.m. of floor space incorporated in the Plan. Similar to the housing provision, and to give an element of flexibility, an additional allocation of around 20% has been included to ensure that land availability does not affect achievability. There is an excess of commercial land supply in most sustainable locations in the district (particularly Tiverton and Cullompton) and the allocation of floor space reflects this with Tiverton taking 20% and Cullompton 50% of the total. This underpins the emphasis on the strategic growth and regeneration of Cullompton. **These employment policies are supported by UPC.**
- The Plan continually emphasises the need to reduce travel by car (S1) but given that Mid-Devon district is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the country this will be difficult. The Plan cannot differentiate between travel for pleasure and travel for work and figures obtained of 25% inward commuting and 43% outward commuting are no more than is to be expected. The geographical locations of the three main towns in Mid-Devon lend themselves to relatively short commutes to work. Crediton is clearly orientated to Exeter for work and for pleasure being only 8 miles distant and it could be argued that it should be considered a satellite town of the city. Cullompton, similarly is only 12 miles from Exeter with the added advantage of the M5 making the journey time only 15 minutes. Even Tiverton with the A361 North Devon Link Road and M5 is easily accessible to both Exeter and Taunton. Long gone are the days of L S Lowry 'Coming Home from the Mill' and workers living in the shadow of their employment base. Most people do not do so – people live where they choose and choose not to work where they live.
- Developers continue to argue that Mid-Devon is in a straight-jacket, constrained, and lagging behind with the allocation of employment land. Yet Mid-Devon is above the Devon average for business density and business start-up although below the average for job density. This is not surprising as it again reflects Mid-Devon's rural characteristic, people starting up very small businesses, often digitally based, and working from home. When the economy picks up again they may perhaps consider

employing additional staff. You cannot usefully compare rural mid-Devon with Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay. Mid-Devon does not need to construct vast employment sites to provide an increase in job opportunities when these are currently on offer just outside its boundaries and with substantial opportunities for job creation within.

- Jobs in mid-Devon and for its residents are not a problem per-se, and data from the Office for National Statistics show rates of unemployment, JSA claimant count and unemployed of the economically active population, at levels well below the national average. The 16-64 age group only account for 59% of mid-Devon's population and this is set to reduce in the Plan period.
- There are numerous employment opportunities close by in the M5 corridor:-
 - J23/J24, Bridgwater – the 'Gateway to the South-West'
 - J25, Taunton – already developed to the north and west and 4,000 jobs to be created on a 60 acre site to the east of J25
 - J26, Wellington – substantial availability at West Park and Foxmoor Business Park
 - Nr J27 - Mid Devon Business Park at Willand is almost empty
 - J28, – Additional development (see Plan)
 - J29, – Exeter – Skypark 6500 jobs; Moor Exchange 400 jobs to be created; proposed Exeter City Centre Bus Station development on 70 acre site, a leisure extension of Princesshay with cinema, pool, cafes and a public square.

UPC is confident that the employment allocations in the Local Plan will absorb existing job seekers and easily provide for the net increase of those moving into the district.

- Town Centres (S7) – A vital element and focus of the Plan that protects, regenerates and enhances the market towns of Mid-Devon by seeking to secure the sustainability of these centres. This is consistent with the policy adopted by MDDC in recent years. **UPC supports this approach** and MDDC has shown its commitment by already providing finance to regenerate the Tiverton central area Pannier Market and land allocation for a mixed development at Phoenix Lane within the Plan.
- Infrastructure (S8) – **Supported**, but more emphasis should be placed on existing infrastructure deficiencies that need to be addressed before additional development, or rectified at the same time as the construction of new facilities, with additional investment
- Environment (S9) – The Council has clearly recognised why tourism flourishes in Mid-Devon; not because of visitor attractions but mainly through its distinctive quality, character, diversity, cultural and historic background and most of all its countryside and scenery. The environmental qualities of Mid-Devon are highly valued by the local community and need to be preserved; this is the main reason that people live here and re-locate to the area.

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MANAGING DEVELOPMENT

- **DM2** – Mid-Devon is experiencing a growth in solar farms that has substantially impacted on the landscape and character of the area in which they have been permitted. Most are in highly visible locations and many near to dwellings. At Willand, for instance, there are solar farms on two of its boundaries and a planning application for a third on another. Such a cumulative impact is not in accord with DM2.
- **DM3** – This policy is very relevant to an area such as mid-Devon that is very reliant on private motor vehicle usage and will continue to be so. Transport Assessments, Travel Plans and Pollution Assessments should be made available at the planning application stage and subject to public scrutiny and not as Reserved Matters at a later stage of the application process. Villages in Mid-Devon were not built with the 'car' in mind and this has led to traffic density and pollution problems on a local scale. Further development in these 'pockets' should be carefully examined – dwellings termed as 'in-filling' do make a difference.
- **DM5** – Parking. In recent years the number of planning applications submitted to change the use of a garage to residential, or to build on the drive or access to a dwelling, has increased at an alarming rate. The Planning Authorities should resist such applications if the outcome would lead to additional on-street parking (see DM11).
- **DM6** – The principle of rural exceptions sites for affordable housing is **firmly supported**, providing it is to meet a proven local need in rural areas, and remains available for this type of housing in perpetuity.
- **DM9** – In theory UPC has no objection to such conversions but in reality recent years has seen manipulation of the planning system by would-be developers using this policy as a shield. There are examples close to Uffculme – Langlands began as small rural building conversions and is now a fully blown industrial estate. Hitchcocks Farm similarly, where large industrial buildings have been erected on land occupied by chicken sheds.
- **DM14** – Town centre development is a centre piece of the Plan and the wide range of permitted uses set out in DM14 is practical giving flexibility in the redevelopment and regeneration of market towns.
- **DM15** – **UPC strongly supports this policy** as confirmation of the NPPF sequential approach to site selection in determining land allocations. This ensures any edge of centre and out of town proposals must be well related to the town centre given that, by definition, such proposals will be less sustainable and may impact on town centre health.
- **DM19** – Allocated employment land needs to be retained as a valuable asset to ensure that the Plan delivers one of its key objectives, that of a thriving economy. The relaxation of this protection to allow other uses should be robustly examined prior to any decisions taken. Currently there is a planning application in progress at Willand (Policy W12) to build 97 dwellings on the Mid Devon Business Park. Evidence submitted to date does not show that the land is no longer required for industrial use or that there is no demand. (The Co-operative has applied for a store on the area showing such demand does exist.) It is also noted that the proposed housing site would be surrounded on three sides by industrial buildings. UPC trusts that MDDC will activate Policy DM19 and refuse the residential planning application.

- DM23 – Policies relating to community facilities should be positive with regard to new provision and re-development and cautiously implemented in relation to the loss of any such facility. The 'supermarket cull' has left many rural settlements devoid of important facilities and every encouragement should be given through the planning system to revitalise these areas.
- DM29 – UPC welcomes MDDC's intentions to publish a Local Enforcement Plan. Enforcement is often an area where Parishes take the brunt of public criticism and a more integrated approach is required.

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POLICIES S1 AND S2 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND AMOUNT/DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT

- As stated above UPC firmly supports the development focus at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton as mid-Devon's most sustainable settlements, with long term growth to the east of Cullompton and limited development in villages and the countryside. UPC's main focus is on Cullompton and Tiverton being 5 and 7 miles distant, respectively.
- Tiverton is the largest urban settlement in the area and would, therefore, be expected to be the focus for both housing and commercial development. The Plan reflects this but on a smaller scale than would be the norm largely due to physical constraints. The proposals are reasonable given these constraints and can be compensated by the land availability at Cullompton to absorb additional growth. Much of Tiverton's development will be within the Eastern Urban Extension, a Masterplan plan adopted in 2014. This is a reasonable provision given the current size and extent of the town, taking over 1500 dwellings, commercial floor space, a new access to the A361, a school, a neighbourhood centre, and possibly a waste to energy plant. UPC contends that Tiverton is a sustainable location to meet a significant amount of the housing and employment needs assessed and incorporated into the Plan.
- Cullompton – UPC welcomes, and positively supports, the Plan's strategy for the market town of Cullompton to become the strategic focus of new development in the medium to long term. This decision is a reflection of its potential to absorb both housing and employment development in a sustainable manner on sites to the east of the M5 motorway at J28 and also in the north-west area of the town.
- UPC met with representatives of Cullompton Town Council at an early stage of the 2014 Options Consultation. This document had options for a new settlement either at J27/Willand or J28 Cullompton East and it became clear that the Town Council and the local community were actively promoting growth for Cullompton. In recent years CTC has been starved of funds that are urgently required to undertake major infrastructure improvements in the town, and the proposals in the Plan of controlled development will allow developer contributions to fund a proportion of these improvements.
- Both the Highways Agency and DCC have put forward plans to upgrade J28 including a new bridge to the south of that existing, and additional slip roads at the Duke Street bridge and at J28. These will, in effect, act as a Town Centre Relief Road and together with a new road from Tiverton Road to Willand Road as part of the north-west urban extension, will relieve extreme traffic congestion that currently exists in the town centre. In addition to the road network improvements other proposals include the re-opening of Cullompton railway station, school investment, a bus station and leisure and shopping enhancements. Significant growth in Cullompton will be sustainable through this major investment in infrastructure at the same time remedying existing deficiencies including over-capacity at J28, air quality and quality of life for residents.
- The above proposals will revitalise and regenerate the town centre boosting its status as a key market town in mid-Devon district and UPC contends that this represents the most favourable option in terms of Local Plan Site Allocation meeting the NPPF sequential selection criteria.

POLICY S13 - RURAL AREAS - VILLAGES

- **Uffculme** has been included as one of the 22 rural settlements designated as villages suitable for limited development; having three essential services – education, a convenience store and transport links. The Plan states that development will be limited to proposals within its defined settlement limit for small scale housing, employment, tourism and leisure, services and facilities serving the locality and other limited development enhancing community vitality or meeting local need.
- Along with many other rural settlements Uffculme has experienced substantial growth in the last quarter of a century. Large scale housing developments to the west (Culm Valley Way/ Caumont Close/Clarke Close), to the north (Highland Park/Pathfields), to the east (Meadow View/Orchard Close/Eastfield Orchard) and to the south (Denners Way), came hot on the heels of those in the early 80's at Pippinsfield, Markers and Wellands Close. Even outside the village both Parsonage and Yondercott Farms have been converted to form a number of dwellings.
- The effect of this development has been to continually extend the settlement limit of the village and to substantially alter its rural character; its original characteristic features being gradually eroded to become a "half-way" house being neither a village nor a small town.
- What has been striking during this period, however, is that the village infrastructure has remained virtually unchanged. Uffculme is synonymous with narrow roads most of which do not allow two way traffic, severe parking problems (there is no public car park) hindering the passage of utility and emergency vehicles, and a lack of footways in many areas. In addition there are around 120 HGV movements a day to/from AB Agri Feed Mill in Bridge Street necessitating all vehicles to negotiate the main road through the village for its entire length, causing danger to the public and deterioration in the quality of life.
- The expanding population has put a strain on the two schools with numbers much increased by those attending from outside of the catchment area. There has been pressure on the College Surgery, with many appointments having to be made at Cullompton. The sewerage, surface water run-off systems and sewerage treatment works are now overloaded. Fortunately two shops have survived the "supermarket cull", one incorporating a Post Office facility.
- Recent development has rendered village roads inadequate and the access roads to Uffculme are also very poor. The only road of any substance is the B3440 to the west towards Willand and Cullompton that is two way from Pippinsfield outwards. However, ignoring HGV traffic that has no alternative route, the majority of traffic movements are to/from the north and east using the M5 at J27, and to Tiverton, Wellington and Taunton. All the access roads used are sub-standard, often narrow, and have dangerous junctions with the B3181 and A38, particularly at Leonard Moor Cross and Downs Farm junction / Appledore Cross. The latter junctions have been described by DCC as "less than adequate", and in addition these take all the traffic from the Broadpath Landfill, the Concrete Products factory and the Bagging Plant all sited on the outskirts of the village.
- The junction at Leonard Moor Cross is a key access point to/from Uffculme along the C107. It is narrow, lacks clear visibility and has inherent dangers, in that it takes virtually all of the school traffic daily accessing the Uffculme Academy (almost 1000 pupils), together with the junior Academy at Ashley Road (200 pupils). This results in

nightmare scenarios twice a day inhibiting others going about their daily business. The population of the village is virtually increased by a third at these peak times.

- Against this background Uffculme Parish Council's (UPC) submission to the "call for sites process" did not identify any further areas for residential development in the village. However, it accepts and supports Policy S13 that would, in effect, allow infilling and minor development within the current settlement limit. It is opposed to any extension of the limit, as any major development would substantially increase the village population putting even greater pressures on the already over-burdened infrastructure.
- However, during the consultation process 5 locations were put forward as potential development sites. Subsequently all were rejected by Mid Devon District Council (MDDC), and excluded from the Pre-Submission Plan.
- In the event of challenges to the Plan, UPC would comment as follows:-

1. Land at Chapel Hill – "landlocked" and subsequently confirmed as unavailable.
2. Land off Ashley Road – a northern extension of an area recently granted consent for 10 dwellings. It is within both Waste and Minerals Consultations Zones, the site is elevated and would result in overlooking and access and highway issues have been raised.
3. Land at Poynings – situated in an elevated position in an area of rural character, and with access along the C107 where the HA states "it would not wish to see a significant increase in traffic." Development would have visual/landscape impacts and the potential to change the character of an area currently outside the settlement limit.
4. Land adj. Sunnysdene/Clay Lane – the proposed allocation is relatively minor in terms of a potential 10 dwellings and could normally be absorbed within the existing context and infrastructure of the village. It now resides in a Waste Consultation Zone and access to/from the site is poor as Clay Lane is extremely narrow and traffic movements are restricted by parked vehicles. Its junction with Ashley Road is dangerous with extremely poor visibility. A development of 5 dwellings is currently under construction on Clay Lane that will increase traffic still further. Whilst UPC would consider this development in normal circumstances, and it is technically deliverable, it is the Highway Authority that will ultimately determine the outcome.

(Note: Council has been advised that the owners of the land intend to lodge an objection to the Plan in respect of this site. The Parish Council has no additional comments to make.)

5. Land West of Uffculme –

This site has the potential to impact most on Uffculme. Politically the area is within Halberton Parish (Halberton is 3-4 miles distant), but the infrastructure of Uffculme would have to support any development. CIL monies would need to be allocated to Uffculme, that might require a change in the parish boundary..

Parish Council policy has consistently opposed development along Uffculme Road as this would ultimately join Uffculme and Willand. UPC wishes to retain the rural setting between the two communities and their individual identities.

MDDC has consistently opposed the erection of dwellings within the curtilage of 'Harvesters' (situated at the eastern end of the proposed site) as an intrusion into the countryside and, therefore, the current proposal for 60 dwellings has been

excluded from the Pre-Submission Plan. It would extend the village in a linear fashion along the B3440 and Inspectors have previously drawn attention to the present boundary of the village, to the front of Harvesters, as "being a defined feature beyond which the village should not be extended".

Traffic issues also arise with Uffculme Road being long and straight where traffic speeds are high, and access to any development would necessitate the road being widened to include a filter lane allowing vehicles to wait in the centre of the carriageway to turn right when approaching from the Willand direction. Traffic would also use Bridwell Avenue to access the B3181/A38 and M5, a narrow road that would be unable to readily accommodate the additional traffic. Indeed traffic generated by any development would clearly have an adverse impact on the local road network.

(Note: Since MDDC agreement to the content of the Pre-Submission Plan, an outline planning application has been submitted "for up to 60 dwellings with access onto Uffculme Road, with all other matters reserved". (ref 15.0108). The Parish Council has opposed this application for the reasons detailed above and it is anticipated that as the site has been excluded from the Local Plan MDDC are most likely to refuse consent. UPC has been advised that an appeal would then be lodged to be determined either during the Local Plan process or at the Public Inquiry itself, a matter that would be decided by the Planning Inspectorate. According to documentation submitted with the planning application the main basis of an appeal would be that MDDC do not currently have the 5 year housing requirement land supply for residential development in the Plan area. The Housing Land Availability Assessment 2014 contradicts this view and the issue will ultimately be determined by an Inspector. Emphasis has also been placed on Uffculme being one of the previously defined "Selected Local Centres" in the former Devon County Structure Plan and that Uffculme is only one of two SLC's that has not been provided with an allocation in the Local Plan. UPC considers this reference irrelevant. Although SLC's did identify those villages where facilities existed that indicated a more sustainable location for growth and development, Uffculme has indeed experienced considerable development in the last 30 years, but more importantly, it has not received the infrastructure improvements that should have been provided given its SLC status – it does not even have a 'public car park'.)

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PROPOSAL BY FRIENDS LIFE/AXA TO ALLOCATE LAND ADJACENT TO J27 OF THE M5 MOTORWAY FOR A MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT TO BE CALLED "WESTWOOD"

- The most contentious issue that arose during the Local Plan consultations was the proposed development of around 90 hectares on land to the east of J27 of the M5 that included provision for a variety of main town centre and other land uses including retail, leisure, entertainment, tourism, storage/distribution and a retirement village.
- Responses to the Draft Plan had to reach MDDC by 24 March 2014 and indeed letters of objection to J27 sent to our MP Neil Parish, and forwarded to MDDC at a later date, were rejected. In contrast material from the promoters of the scheme was still being received and reviewed by the Council right up to the key Council Meetings in December 2014. Despite this time extension the proposals have been totally rejected by the Council's own independent consultants, GVA; its report detailing the failures in meeting the required planning benchmarks.
- The reason why UPC is drawing attention to this issue at this stage, despite its exclusion from the Pre-Submission Plan, is that a challenge to the Plan is anticipated from the promoters of the J27 scheme either during the present consultation period or at the Public Inquiry stage. The proposals were accompanied by a constant PR and propaganda exercise, backed by the local press, and even the engagement of Sir Tim Smit, the founder of the Eden Project (currently in extreme financial difficulty) to support the scheme. It is, therefore, very unlikely that the promoters will accept MDDC's rejection of the scheme lightly.
- **UPC wishes to make it absolutely clear that it totally opposes development at J27 and that it supports MDDC's decision to exclude it from the Local Plan.** This is a position it has consistently adopted through the Local Plan processes of 2006 and 2010 when smaller scale development at this junction was proposed and rejected by the Inquiry Inspectors. It considers that the NPPF concurs with this view in relation to the sequential approach to selection of sites, in that if there are viable town centre or edge of town options available to meet an objectively assessed need, then these should be allocated in preference to greenfield sites.
- MDDC also take this view in that the Spatial Strategy identifies the market town of Cullompton as becoming the strategic focus of new development in the medium to long term, reflecting its accessibility, economic potential and environmental capacity. **UPC is fully supportive of this approach, actively promoted by Cullompton Town Council, in order to fulfil its objective to provide and underpin the development and regeneration of a successful and vibrant community market town that will enhance Mid Devon district.**
- Should development ever occur at J27, Uffculme, along with Willand, would be the settlements most affected. At the Options consultation stage UPC detailed its objections in a comprehensive report and these are summarised below:-
- **Traffic** – The HA are currently upgrading J27 under the Pinch-Point programme stating that "the introduction of a third lane on the southern exit and part-time traffic signals is largely to cater for existing over capacity at the junction and for the Tiverton eastern urban extension and growth". The approach roads to the junction often experience long queues and are incapable of an upgrade to meet the anticipated traffic flows generated by the proposed development. It is calculated that in excess of 11000 traffic movements a day would result from the Westwood proposals. From Uffculme's viewpoint road access to/from the village (3000 residents boosted by

1200 school pupils daily) is substandard, inadequate with narrow roads and dangerous junctions. Development at J27 would cause further aggravation and have catastrophic consequences on the local road network. It is noted that DCC indicates that the J27 motorway junction could accommodate the leisure/commercial development with further improvements, but this has not been detailed in any traffic plan. The HA seem to contradict this stance stating that "sufficient evidence has not been presented to substantiate this assertion". UPC contends that if a traffic plan could be produced, which it very much questions, then it would be complex, difficult to engineer and extremely costly.

- Effects on Town Centres and Local Businesses – Clearly any development at J27 would have an effect on town centres and local businesses – the question is to what extent. Finite disposal income would be distributed in a differing pattern merely meaning a shift in spend from one area to another. Many of the elements of the J27 proposal are available in nearby towns, villages, countryside and larger towns/cities including farm shops, garden centres, cafes and restaurants, hotels, cinema and retail outlets.
GVA states in its report that "the scale of uses proposed at J27 has not been justified and is likely to affect the health and function of other town centres through loss of market share, an adverse financial impact, and the potential to impact on investment and a general loss of vitality and viability". It also concludes that the "scale and function of the proposed allocation will impact on the role of nearby centres by offering a rival shopping and leisure destination". UPC further notes that under the "Duty to Co-operate" concept objections to J27 based on retail and town centre issues were lodged by a number of neighbouring authorities including Exeter City Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, North Devon District Council, East Devon District Council, Plymouth City Council and Mendip District Council.
- The 'Enabling' Argument – The J27 proposals are promoted as 'unique' and that the development must be in its entirety and can only be accommodated at this location. The argument is advanced that the commercial element is necessary to fund as a cross-subsidy the less economic leisure uses, but no viability assessment has been produced. UPC has consistently rejected this argument as sites are available in the near vicinity, in or on the edge of town centres, for many of the individual elements of the proposal. GVA agree with this view stating that "there is no evidence that individual elements of the scheme are not viable and that there is no justification why all the land use elements must be provided together. Many more sequentially preferable sites are available for individual and combined uses in both Mid Devon and neighbouring authorities. The approach by Westwood does not accord with the sequential approach to site selection."
- Need – J27 promoters argue there is a need for leisure and commercial allocation at J27 and that the creation of 3,500 jobs would, in effect, be a bonus for the district, leading to greater economic activity. However, the evidence put forward in their submission is rejected by GVA in that it does not demonstrate an 'objectively assessed need' and does not take into account the allocations already made in the Local Plan by MDDC to satisfy that need that reflects predicted 'natural' population and employment growth. In addition, there is no argument to substantiate that any such provision to satisfy a perceived need can only be located at J27.

- **Additional Housing** – Should J27 be developed the promoters must demonstrate how the additional housing required, over and above that allocated in the Plan, will be provided to support the extra job creation. As this can only be on land that has been subject to consultation then it seems that the land between J27 and Willand would be the likely option with a new settlement required with associated infrastructure and services. MDDC has already examined such a proposal “but found it both inappropriate and likely to be unachievable (1.16)”. **UPC has consistently opposed any new settlement for this area and welcomes MDDC’s decision to concentrate development east of J28 at Cullompton.**
- **Community Interest** – J27 promoters take the view that local communities would benefit from development, but have not quantified this assertion. UPC considers it is not in the community interest to develop a large open greenfield site when suitable alternatives are available. **UPC supports both MDDC and CTC in that Cullompton should be developed in preference to J27 and J27/Willand for both commercial and residential development.**
- **Sustainability** – Clearly the site is ‘unustainable’ by any normal interpretation of the word as virtually all users would have to access by motor vehicle. It is remote from major centres of population and it would illogical to allocate the site in the Local Plan with other options available. The proposal is also unusual in that it includes a small housing development for retired people (why would the elderly want to live next to a motorway, adjacent to a large development, with no services available?) UPC considers it to be included as the remainder of the development would be totally unsustainable, and that if housing could be approved as part of the overall scheme this would set a precedent for developers to claim that this would be the only way to make the proposal more sustainable and open the door for residential ribbon development towards Willand.
- **Developer Intentions** – Developers often tend to overstate the benefits of their proposals and understate the problems, effects and costs. Past experience has often shown unfulfilled proposals, based on outline planning, rendered subsequently unviable, with profitable housing being the only option to pursue rather than abandoning the project mid-stream.
- **Setting/Loss of Countryside** - This is a general point about any proposals for J27. The location is highly visible and elevated from the M5, A361 and railway and gives the perception of an unspoilt rural area to those entering Devon. It is the “Gateway to Devon” and needs to remain a countryside location to show visitors that Devon is a rural county with rural character and rolling countryside. A greenfield site should not be considered for development when suitable alternatives exist, and the loss of agricultural land that would result can never be recovered. In 2006 the Local Plan Inquiry Inspector stated “the towns are the most suitable locations and it is to there that development should be directed, rather than rural areas around the motorway junction ... further re the Food Park (a previous scheme put forward by the current developer) ... the argument for it to be in a specific location is not a weighty one. Plenty of employment land is being proposed in and around the main towns (as is the case now) two of which are not too distant from the motorway. That should provide plenty of opportunity for a Food Park to be provided in a sustainable location.” In 2010 the Inspector endorsed this general view and the position today remains unchanged.

- Local Opposition – in addition to objections raised by neighbouring authorities under the Duty to Co-operate concept, it should be noted that all the local Parish and Town Councils who would be affected by development at J27 expressed their opposition to the proposals at the Options consultation stage. In addition, a number of public meetings were held in the area showing public opinion overwhelmingly opposed to the development.

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