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22 March 2022

Via email: [planmiddevon@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:planmiddevon@middevon.gov.uk)

Dear Planning Policy Team,

## **Plan Mid Devon 2023 – 2043 - Local Plan Issues Regulation 18 Consultation – February 2022**

Thank you for providing National Highways with the opportunity to comment on the Plan Mid Devon Issues Local Plan Consultation. As you will be aware we are responsible for operating, maintaining and improving the strategic road network (SRN), which in the Plan area comprises the M5 motorway and A30 trunk road, in particular M5 junctions 27 and 28 and a section of the A30 at Cheriton Bishop. The purpose of the SRN, which is a critical national infrastructure asset, is to provide a safe, free-flowing and reliable highway network for strategic movements to support economic growth. It is on the basis of these responsibilities that our comments are made.

### Background

National Highways (previously known as Highways England) is keen to ensure that transport and land use planning policy is closely integrated. In this respect, National Highways draws your attention to *“The Strategic Road Network - Planning for the Future - A Guide to Working with Highways England On Planning Matters* and DfT Circular 02/2013, which sets out how we will engage with the planning system to support the delivery of sustainable development.

National Highways recognises that prosperity depends on our roads, so aims to support growth and facilitate development based on an understanding of traffic conditions and behaviour, to manage the effects of development and ensure any adverse impacts on road safety are considered and mitigated. To constructively engage in the local plan-making process, we require a robust evidence-base for consideration so that sound advice can be given to local planning authorities on the appropriateness of proposed development in relation to the SRN. This also extends to the shaping of the necessary infrastructure investment strategy that may be required to mitigate adverse impacts on the SRN and support the delivery of sustainable economic growth across the Plan area and beyond.

### Policy Context

Paragraph 12 of DfT Circular 02/2013 states that, *“The preparation and delivery of Local Plans provides an opportunity to identify and support a pattern of development that minimises trip generation at source and encourages the use of sustainable modes of transport, minimises journey lengths for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities, and promotes*

*accessibility for all. This can contribute to environmental objectives and also reduce the cost to the economy arising from the environmental, business and social impacts associated with traffic generation and congestion.”*

Paragraph 15 states that, *“In order to develop a robust transport evidence base [for local plans], the Agency (now National Highways) will work with the local authority to understand the transport implications of development options. This will include assessing the cumulative and individual impacts of the Local Plan proposals upon the ability of the road links and junctions affected to accommodate the forecast traffic flows in terms of capacity and safety.”*

Paragraph 18 states that, *“Capacity enhancements and infrastructure required to deliver strategic growth should be identified at the Local Plan stage, which provides the best opportunity to consider development aspirations alongside the associated strategic infrastructure needs. Enhancements should not normally be considered as fresh proposals at the planning application stage. The Highways Agency (now National Highways) will work with strategic delivery bodies to identify infrastructure and access needs at the earliest possible opportunity in order to assess suitability, viability and deliverability of such proposals, including the identification of potential funding arrangements.”*

Responses to Local Plan consultations are also guided by other pertinent policy and guidance, namely the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the “The strategic road network - Planning for the future - A guide to working with National Highways on planning matters”. More information is contained within the Planning Practice Guidance which supports the NPPF.

### Strategic Road Network Considerations

Within the NPPF “Preparing and Reviewing Plans”, it is stated that all plans and policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. We recognise that work to develop the transport evidence base for the emerging Local Plan is in its early stage, but will be required for later stages of consultation and subsequently at Examination. This should include a transport strategy and transport assessment which identifies the highway and transport infrastructure necessary to deliver the Plan and address any severe and/or unacceptable safety impacts on the SRN. This evidence base must conform with the NPPF and DfT Circular 02/2013.

The current performance of the SRN within and just outside Mid Devon’s boundaries will need to be considered in the evidence base. M5 Junctions 27 and 28 currently experience congestion at peak times.

The evidence base will need to consider the impact of newly proposed allocations and those to be carried forward from the adopted Local Plan the M5 and A30 trunk road mainline and junctions and identify any required improvements over and above those already planned/delivered. Any necessary infrastructure improvements should be included within an updated Infrastructure Development Plan/transport strategy and clearly signposted in Local Plan policy.

National Highways looks forward to working with Mid Devon District Council in respect of the assessment of the Local Plan impacts and identifying any necessary infrastructure improvements on/for the SRN. In terms of the Regulation 18 – Issues Consultation paper we make the following comments.

## 2.0 Our Mid Devon

### Local Plan Priorities

Once adopted the new Local Plan will supersede the Mid Devon Local Plan Review 2013-2033 which was adopted in July 2020. Plan Mid Devon extends the Local Plan horizon year from 2023-2043 within a vision that looks ahead to 2053.

The Local Plan is supported by 6 top priorities with Priority 1 being identified as the top overarching priority for the Local Plan:

*“Priority 1 – Responding to the climate emergency and moving to a net-zero carbon future.”*

National Highways supports this key priority for Mid Devon District Council and considers that it is aligned with NPPF principles.

The remaining priorities are set out as follows:

- *“Priority 2 – Delivering development, infrastructure and regeneration to meet our needs now and in the future;*
- *Priority 3 – Addressing housing affordability and improving choice;*
- *Priority 4 – Protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment, and respecting environmental limits;*
- *Priority 5 – Improving our health and well-being; and*
- *Priority 6 – Supporting rural vitality and a prosperous rural economy.”*

We welcome the focus on Priority 2 regarding delivering development, infrastructure and regeneration to meet our needs now and in the future as the Local Plan develops. In terms of improving choice regarding housing location in Priority 3, we await consultation on specific sites but this is welcomed in principle by National Highways. A robust transport evidence base will need to be produced to support the emerging Local Plan to ensure that any infrastructure needed to accommodate growth is identified at the earliest opportunity. We invite early engagement on this point to ensure that the transport evidence base meets our requirements to prevent abortive works and assist with the delivery of Local Plan that can be found sound at Examination.

## 4.0 Climate Emergency

Paragraph 4.1 sets out the main approaches that new development can reduce its carbon footprint and help make it resilient to climate impacts. This includes enabling active travel, increasing the accessibility of and access of public transport services and reducing greenhouse gas emissions due to its location and design.

National Highways agrees that the location of development is likely to be a critical factor in delivering sustainable development in terms of transport impacts. Therefore, within paragraph 4.3 we are pleased to see that this opportunity regarding sustainable site allocation and the associated investment in sustainable travel options is highlighted. We support the use of digital connectivity to facilitate home working to manage down demand on the SRN during network peak hours to deliver carbon emission reductions.

Paragraphs 4.7-8 discuss reducing the need to travel by car largely by improving opportunities to work remotely. In addition, the provision for local employment and services is emphasised. However, we note that the District states in the consultation that due to Mid Devon being a rural

District that there is a heavy reliance on the private car for transport. Therefore, we support measures to deliver a reduction in people travelling to work by private car to reduce the demand on the SRN, including measures to increase remote working where feasible.

## 6.0 Meeting Housing Needs

Paragraph 6.7 sets out that the current housing requirement for Mid Devon District (following the Government's standard methodology) is 365 dwellings per annum. This is less than the 393 dwellings in the current adopted Local Plan.

We understand that Mid Devon District Council has recently undertaken a 'Call for Sites' consultation and is currently undergoing an initial assessment to understand potential site requirements and capacity. We invite early consultation regarding sites being considered for allocation within the Local Plan, with reference to any sites with a potential impact on the SRN. Any impacts will need to be identified and mitigation tested by the development of a robust transport evidence base. To avoid abortive work, we suggest that the scope of the transport evidence base is developed in conjunction with National Highways input.

## 7.0 Supporting Our Businesses and Jobs

We note that the Council are in the process of updating the Economic Development Needs Assessment so that this will be available at the next Plan Mid Devon – Draft Policies and Site Options consultation, to account for the impacts of both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. We welcome this update as it will provide useful evidence to support the Local Plan and any employment site allocations. We wish to be provided with a copy of this as part of the Local Plan process.

***“Q23 How do you think we should plan for a green economic recovery in Mid Devon? Please select 3 priorities.”***

National Highways supports option *“Green public transport, cycling and walking,”* to plan for a green economic recovery as it is in accordance with NPPF principles and manages down demand on the SRN.

We understand that business park workspace is in high demand in Mid Devon. At present it is focused across the 3 main towns and along the SRN corridor. The current adopted Local Plan makes further provision for commercial floorspace at Junction 27 for a high-quality tourist and leisure focussed development. Regarding the emerging Local Plan, Mid Devon District Council would like to allocate further sites and introduce more diverse employment space.

We are pleased to see that the consultation states one of the key issues for Mid Devon is to try to deliver more mixed-use development to reduce the proportion of out-commuting to neighbouring districts.

In terms of the employment site allocation spatial approaches outlined within the consultation, we do not offer a preference. However, as indicated above, we expect that any site allocations to be tested within the transport evidence base to demonstrate that they are deliverable without a severe impact to the SRN in terms of safety or capacity.

## 8.0 Infrastructure and How We Travel

We welcome the commitment in paragraphs 8.1 and 8.6 to work with Highways England (now National Highways) to align the growth within Mid Devon District with the appropriate infrastructure required to support that growth.

We note that there is reference to reviewing the infrastructure (including transport) needed to support strategic allocations at Northwest Cullompton and East Cullompton as part of the Plan Mid Devon evidence base. This will feed into the Plan Mid Devon Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The Council states that where possible they will investigate opportunities to forward fund infrastructure. We are interested to understand how this will be undertaken.

National Highways will require a cumulative site assessment to be undertaken as part of the transport evidence base to ascertain any mitigation that is required, and at what point this needs to be delivered to safely accommodate the impact of growth. This should directly feed in to an IDP to identify what infrastructure is required, the delivery timescales, funding requirements and the lead delivery organisation to ensure that the Local Plan is deliverable and 'sound'.

### ***“Q25. What do you consider to be the key infrastructure issues that Plan Mid Devon needs to address?”***

In terms of key infrastructure issues that Plan Mid Devon needs to address, National Highways considers that any strategic site allocations need to be assessed on a cumulative basis to ensure that there is no severe adverse impact on the SRN in terms of capacity or safety. If a severe impact is determined, then proposed mitigation should be identified in conjunction with the funding body and timescales for delivery. Ideally this should be undertaken in conjunction with site promoters. Also, this should be tested within the transport evidence base to ascertain if the mitigation has any subsequent severe impacts on the SRN elsewhere.

Paragraph 8.8 confirms that Plan Mid Devon will continue to work closely with National Highways to ensure timely delivery of improvements required at M5 junctions 27 and 28 to facilitate planned growth within the current adopted Local Plan. We look forward to working closely with Mid Devon District Council regarding the infrastructure improvements required to deliver the site allocations within the adopted Local Plan and to work with them regarding developing the transport evidence base for the emerging Plan Mid Devon.

The consultation document advises that at the time of the 2011 census, 37% of the workforce commuted out of the District to work and 50% of that number worked in Exeter. With such a high proportion of residents outcommuting and high demand for employment workspace there is a significant opportunity to manage down demand for travel to work. We welcome consideration of site allocations that reflect this as the Mid Devon Local Plan is developed, to manage down demand on the SRN.

Paragraph 8.15-16 discusses the opportunity to prioritise sustainable car travel in Plan Mid Devon when allocating and masterplanning new sites to ensure that new/improved walking and cycling routes are provided plus accessing the new rail station that is planned at Cullompton. We support this focus as it is aligned with NPPF and has the potential to deliver a reduction in private car uptake by new residents/employees.

In relation to parking provision for new developments, we recommend that parking at employment sites is considered alongside new standards for residential development sites. Parking standards at destinations has a stronger impact on modal choice than parking availability at a residence, therefore managing down demand for travel by the private car.

## 10.0 Health and Well-Being

***“Q32. Please select what you think should be the top three measures in terms of their importance in the planning our places to encourage and support healthy lifestyles”***

Providing opportunities for active travel, including walking and cycling routes are a key method of supporting healthy lifestyles and also reduce demand on the SRN, hence National Highways endorse this measure for incorporation within Plan Mid Devon.

## 11.0 Our Places

Paragraph 11.6 advises that strategic allocations will need a comprehensive approach to delivering high-quality development with coordinated infrastructure provision and that this will in part be achieved via masterplanning. National Highways welcomes this approach and seeks to work closely with site promoters and Mid Devon District Council to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure required to deliver development up until 2043 is identified and secured to maintain safety and capacity on the SRN and its assets.

## 12.0 Our Towns and Their Environs

Several factors are influencing retail and town centres within the District. These include the rise of internet shopping (especially since Covid-19), home/hybrid work patterns, unknown impact of Brexit and the general reduction in office working. Changes to the planning use system to introduce Class E and F and the easing of changing between certain uses has resulted in flexibility. The Council advise that this may warrant the revision of Local Plan policies to introduce “Article 4 Directions” at Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton town centres to restrict Class E to residential permitted rights.

We understand that the new Local Plan will provide an opportunity to review the policy approach to the three key town centres to potentially include:

- *“Continuing to identify ‘primary shopping areas’ and the ‘primary shopping frontages’, with a percentage threshold for town centre uses, and with potential for using ‘Article 4 directions to remove national permitted development rights to change to residential use; or*
- *No longer defining ‘primary shopping frontages’ and allowing a wider variety of uses in the town centres to support their wider leisure, cultural and entertainment roles.”*

Whilst we offer no opinion on a preferred option, we welcome the retention of a primary shopping area as per NPPF and consideration of retaining town centre viability by including other land uses where there is little demand for retail in areas of retail over provision. We suggest that Mid Devon District Council focuses on enhancing walking, cycling and public transport, to encourage sustainable travel movements into town centres and reducing demand on the SRN.

Whilst we are aware of the general increase in demand for internet shopping and the associated decrease in demand for physical shopping, careful consideration should be given to ensuring that shopping provision is not reduced to such a degree that shoppers travel to other destinations with a larger offering, thus increasing the demand on the SRN.

We advise that preferred option/s should be assessed to identify any potential impacts on the SRN because of planned growth and change in use. We request that we are consulted as the

scope for a supporting transport evidence base is developed to ensure that no abortive works are undertaken.

The concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood strongly supports NPPF principles by encouraging a mix of land uses to manage down demand on the highway network as more needs are met locally without the need to travel by private car. Therefore, we encourage the delivery of local sustainable transport infrastructure to enable this concept to be realised.

### Tiverton and its Environs

The adopted Local plan allocates 1580 dwellings and 30,000 sqm of commercial floorspace at an urban extension to the east of the town. The Council note that any additional growth is potentially constrained due to the capacity of M5 Junction 27 (amongst other potential constraints). Although the signalisation improvements to the junction are appropriate to support the proposed development in the current adopted Local Plan, we welcome early consultation on any potential allocated sites that will impact this junction and the scope for the supporting transport evidence.

### **13.0 Our Rural Areas**

The current Local Plan includes policies to ensure that any rural development does not result in an unacceptable impact on the SRN. We are pleased to note that the emerging Local Plan will assess the cumulative impacts of any rural employment development (including neighbouring authorities).

### **14.0 Culm Garden Village**

Culm Garden Village was identified to have the potential to deliver up to 5,000 sustainable new homes with other mixed uses. Within the adopted Local Plan, 1,750 homes are planned in East Cullompton to 2033 with further provision for 850 homes. Development of the Culm Garden Village is expected to be developed beyond 2043 and Mid Devon District Council advise that therefore a vision will be incorporated that looks ahead to 2053. The new Local Plan will need to include detailed policy regarding how to deliver the existing remaining development to be built including the infrastructure identified as necessary to support it.

It is noted that Plan Mid Devon intends to plan for more than the 5,000 homes currently envisaged to provide a more beneficial community experience. As noted above, the M5 Junction 28 may act as a constraint without additional mitigation and this should be tested as part of a wider cumulative transport evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan to ensure that it is deliverable in transport terms.

As the development proposed is a garden village, we note that design principles regarding providing integrated and accessible transport systems with active modes and public transport designed to be more attractive than the private car. Given the proximity to the SRN and the high rate of out-commuting (particularly to Exeter), we welcome the sustainable focus as per NPPF, to manage down demand on the SRN.

### **15.0 Proposals at Junction 27, M5 Motorway**

Within the current adopted Local Plan, undeveloped land near M5 Junction 27 is allocated for a major regional tourism, leisure and retail attraction with roadside services and pedestrian link to Tiverton Parkway railway station. Paragraph 15.2 states that due to Brexit and Covid-19 travel patterns changing, the emerging Local Plan may be an appropriate time to review these proposals to ensure that they are still the best option for this site. We welcome the confirmation that

technical studies and assumptions may need to be updated to support the emerging Local Plan. Certainly, we would welcome engagement on revised transport evidence which will be required to support any amended proposals at the site.

## **16.0 Sustainable Distribution of Development Across Mid Devon**

Paragraph 16.3 states that due to the better opportunities for public transport and active travel (amongst other similar higher provisions for infrastructure), the three main towns of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton are the preferred areas for new housing site allocations. However, it is also stated that each town is impacted by infrastructure constraints including the transport networks. Therefore, the technical studies and IDP that will inform the spatial planning process will be critical to demonstrating that the Local plan is deliverable in transport terms.

The use of improved broadband technology has enabled more working from home plus internet shopping and a focus on 20-minute neighbourhoods by the delivery of a greater mix of local services to help reduce travel by car and highway congestion. This gives greater opportunities to deliver truly sustainable development within the emerging Local Plan whilst noting there may be a requirement to consider how to meet rising LGV numbers.

### **Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report January 2022**

We consider that the proposed sustainability objective I – *“Delivering the necessary infrastructure”* is an appropriate objective for capturing the impacts of the Local Plan on the SRN.

#### **Summary**

As the development of the Local Plan and transport evidence base remains in its early stages, and no assessment has yet been provided to support the current Issues consultation, the likely impact of the Plan Mid Devon’s spatial strategy on the SRN and any necessary infrastructure requirements are currently unknown. We understand that the Draft Policies and Site options consultation is due to be consulted on in Spring 2023, and we invite Mid Devon to meet with us to discuss the scope of any technical supporting evidence in relation to the SRN.

Our expectation is that, alongside maximising the opportunity for sustainable travel, the local planning and highway authority will look to strengthen and improve local highway connections to facilitate proposed growth before assessing the need for mitigation options on the SRN. The purpose of the SRN is to provide a safe, effectively operating and reliable highway network for strategic movements to support economic growth. If the SRN is used for significant numbers of local trips this will compromise its ability to fulfil its strategic function and result on local growth being constrained.

The new Local Plan will also need to evidence how development will be managed to ensure that necessary infrastructure is in place in a timely manner to prevent a severe or unacceptable safety impact on the SRN.

We will require the emerging Local Plan to be underpinned by a robust transport evidence base which assesses the cumulative impact of the Plan on the SRN and identifies, in consultation with National Highways, any necessary infrastructure and interventions to ensure that the transport needs of the Plan are met without resulting in a severe or unacceptable impact on the safe and efficient operation of the SRN. This includes but is not limited to:

- identification of the preferred minimum number of homes to be delivered until 2043

- the intended scope of the supporting transport evidence base
- the transport strategy approach to be discussed
- employment sites – if a potential revised assessment due to new economic growth forecasts will be provided resulting in more/alternative sites.

Subject to receiving further information as above, we will be able to confirm whether there are additional issues that will need to be addressed. We look therefore forward to working with you as the Local Plan and transport evidence base develops. This will enable us to respond positively to further Local Plan consultations and at Examination.

We trust that our response is helpful and assists with Mid Devon District Council's Local Plan preparation. If you require further clarification or wish to discuss any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,



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