

Report for: Economy PDG

Date of Meeting:	7 th March 2024
Subject:	Junction 27 and Junction 28 update
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Economic Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy
Exempt:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All wards
Enclosures:	N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To update members on the current position in relation to development at both Junction 27 and Junction 28 of the M5 within Mid Devon.

Recommendation(s):

1. That members note the contents of the report.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Development at Junctions 27 and 28 of the M5 offers a significant opportunity for Mid Devon in terms of the provision of additional employment and/or residential accommodation in highly accessible, strategic and sustainable locations.
- 1.2 This opportunity has already been recognised by virtue of the fact that the Council's adopted Local Plan makes significant allocations at both

of these locations. J27 is focused on commercial/leisure development whilst J28, given its proximity to the existing settlement of Cullompton, is predominantly residential focused.

- 1.3 However, given the nature of these locations; existing barriers to delivery, and; changes in the development sector since the adoption of the Local Plan, development and progression of the sites/allocations has been slower than would have originally been anticipated. This is especially true of Junction 27 where a significant 'gateway' scheme is identified within the adopted local plan but where no significant development activity has taken place since the adoption of the Plan.
- 1.4 This report provides an update in terms of the position with development around both junctions.

2.0 Junction 27

- 2.1 The adopted Local Plan sets out land at Junction 27 is *“allocated for the provision of a major high quality regional tourism, leisure and retail attraction supported by ancillary roadside services and supporting infrastructure including a pedestrian bridge across the M5 motorway linking the site to Tiverton Parkway railway station.”*
- 2.2 The policy is also specific in terms of the expected mix of development, requiring;
 - *Travel Hub (7ha) – Motorway/roadside services; electric car hub; hotel.*
 - *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.*
 - *Outdoor Adventure Zone (6ha) – Surf lake/lagoon; beach; high ropes adventure area.*
 - *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.*
- 2.3 Finally, the Local Plan is also prescriptive in terms of its requirements around how development proposals will be progressed and brought forwards, requiring that;
 - *“Development of the site should be brought forward in accordance with the terms of a detailed development brief, comprehensive masterplanning including at least two stages of public consultation and*

adoption of the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document before any planning application for any part of the site is determined.”

- 2.4 At the time of the original proposals, there was demonstrable developer and occupier interest in the site, with the Eden project (Eden Westwood) identified as a key occupier which could also give the scheme the “*unique leisure destination at the gateway to Devon and Cornwall*” as referenced within the Local Plan.
- 2.5 However, since the adoption of the Local Plan, significant changes have taken place within the retail, tourism and leisure sectors. Schemes have been impacted by the continuation of changing shopping habits, the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent and more recent cost of living crisis. As such, proposals for the scheme have not progressed as would have originally been envisaged.
- 2.6 In December 2021, Eden secured funding from the Community Renewal Fund (via DCC and Government) to undertake further work to consider and refine proposals for the J27 site – considering the viability of a new Eden facility in the context of the Local Plan policies. After engagement with key landowners and stakeholders, Eden presented an update to this PDG group in November 2022 which summarised that, whilst the Eden Westwood scheme at Junction 27 did have notable benefits and opportunities, the delivery of the Eden scheme at that point in time was financially challenged and therefore would not be progressed in the near term.
- 2.7 Since that time, ad-hoc conversations have continued with landowners and prospective occupiers and, whilst some land is believed to have changed hands and some individual proposals partially progressed, no meaningful progress has been made in terms of seeing the clear delivery of development in line with the Local Plan vision or policies. This is despite proactive attempts on behalf of this Council to seek to engage some of the key landowners and occupiers.
- 2.8 With the continued non-delivery of development at Junction 27 in the manner originally conceived through the adopted Local Plan, it will be necessary to consider how the existing allocation should be amended, changed or even removed within the context of the new and emerging Local Plan; Plan Mid Devon.
- 2.9 To support the consideration of the J27 site and other sites/policies through the Plan Mid Devon process, the Forward Planning team have commissioned Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH), a surveying firm with good knowledge of the retail, tourism and leisure sectors, to complete a technical study of the sectors to support the development of Plan Mid

Devon and ensure that the new plan is reflective of current and future market trends, supply and demand of certain types of accommodation and aware of market activity within the district.

- 2.10 The study is nearing completion and will, in due course, be discussed with Members via PPAG (Planning Policy Advisory Group). It is also expected that a high-level summary of findings will be presented to the Economy PDG in due course as the findings of this study will also be crucial in supporting other policy documents including the Economic Strategy and Destination Management Plan – both of which are coming up for review.

3.0 Junction 28 (Cullompton)

- 3.1 Proposals at Junction 28 are in a significantly different position to those at Junction 27. The current Local Plan makes significant allocations for planned growth at the town, especially in terms of residential development. Residential allocations include significant allocations at North West Cullompton as well as at East Cullompton. Potential for further residential development to the east of Cullompton is also identified through the 'Garden Village' proposals. Expectations also exist in terms of the delivery of further commercial development across allocated sites with some development now progressing.
- 3.2 However, whilst significant development is identified within Cullompton and whilst developer interest is strong, development is reliant upon the provision of supporting and enabling transport infrastructure interventions. Notably, this includes the Cullompton Town Centre Relief Road and the need for a 'strategic intervention' at Junction 28 in order to release subsequent phases of planned and anticipated growth.
- 3.3 Unfortunately, despite repeat attempts with compelling funding applications, the Council has not yet been able to secure the infrastructure funding required to unlock delivery of these projects and, as such, Cullompton is now at a point where further development cannot progress until these projects are funded and delivered. This is proving to be a significant constraint to planned growth within Cullompton, but also has wider reaching impacts and implications across the whole district.
- 3.4 Discussions are on-going with regard to securing the funding required to deliver the required infrastructure and enable the planned growth in Cullompton. Notably; officers are continuing discussions with Homes England with regard to funding to enable delivery of the relief road and Mid Devon DC/Devon County Council (DCC) are also completing the

preparation of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for Junction 28 (incorporating the relief road) which, if approved by DCC's Cabinet in March, will then be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT).

- 3.5 Regarding the J28 submission; the 'strategic intervention' at J28 was identified within the Governments 'Network North' scheme prospectus as a beneficiary of funding released from the re-scaling of the HS2 project in order to support connectivity through the whole of the UK. It is therefore expected that the submission will find favour within Government, as an identified scheme, and that further funding will therefore be forthcoming to support the progression of the scheme in a very timely manner in order to support the delivery of much needed, and planned for, development.
- 3.6 It should be noted that an options consultation exercise was recently completed in support of the Junction 28 SOBC submission and that 884 responses were received through the public consultation with overwhelming public support for both the improvements to Junction 28 (95% support) and the town centre relief road (92% support, up from 77% in 2018.) These are phenomenally high levels of support given the increasing level of public concern around climate change and road construction, but they clearly demonstrate the desire and need for the planned infrastructure in Cullompton and the value which the community attributes to these interventions.
- 3.7 Finally, it should also be noted that the Cullompton station re-opening project continues to make good progress with the submission of the Final Business Case to DfT due imminently. Recent announcements and feedback in relation to the project have been extremely positive with every indication that the projects (Cullompton and Wellington) will receive full funding to enable delivery and re-opening to passenger service. Clearly, whilst this will not address the existing traffic constraints within the town, this re-opening will support the town in providing more sustainable travel links with neighbouring towns and cities.
- 3.8 Therefore, whilst successes are being achieved within Cullompton through projects such as the Heritage Action Zone scheme and the station re-opening projects, much depends on the successful delivery of the relief road and J28 upgrade. Timely delivery of these is required in order to support the Council in delivering planned growth and in supporting Cullompton in achieving its full economic, social, environmental and financial potential.

Financial Implications

The report is an information report and does not of itself have any financial implications and require any decisions. However, some of the information contained within the report does have implications for the Council – notably where planned delivery of residential and employment accommodation is failing to materialise which, in turn, has direct financial, social, economic and environmental implications for the district.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

Risk Assessment

There are no further risks associated with the updates in this report that have not already been reported.

Impact on Climate Change

Delivery of planned development is both positive and negative in terms of climate change implications: the re-opening of Cullompton station offers opportunities for more sustainable travel whilst the delivery of new roads reinforces private car usage and involves significant construction with all of the associated environmental impacts.

However, it should also be noted that the schemes will seek to offset their carbon and climate change impacts and that the schemes themselves will also deliver benefits. This is especially relevant within Cullompton, where the infrastructure upgrades have notable potential to reduce the pollution and congestion which arise from the current lack of highways capacity. It is therefore expected that significant local benefits (in the widest sense) will accrue as a result of these infrastructure projects.

Equalities Impact Assessment

No negative equalities impacts are expected: indeed, it is hoped and expected that inequalities should be reduced through the scheme discussed owing to the opportunities to deliver economic, environmental, social and financial benefits and improvements.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team supports the full range of corporate objectives and the corporate plan.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

Date: 27 Feb 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 19/02/2024

Cabinet member notified: yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy

Email: rmarsh@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone:

Background papers: