

**CABINET**  
**DATE 7<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2016**

**PROPOSED GREATER EXETER STRATEGIC PLAN.**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Richard Chesterton  
**Responsible Officer:** Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning & Regeneration

**REASON FOR REPORT:**

This report considers a proposal for a joint strategic plan for the Greater Exeter area which would be prepared in partnership between East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council with assistance from Devon County Council. The plan would cover the geographical area of the 4 partner authorities (excluding the area of Dartmoor National Park) but would be limited in scope to cover strategic issues and strategic allocations within those areas with local issues to be considered through linked local plans prepared by each partner authority for their area.

Councils are required to work together on strategic planning issues under the duty to co-operate that forms part of the National Planning Policy Framework, which must include consideration by those councils of preparing joint plans. In the case of the "Greater Exeter" area a joint plan covering strategy matters is considered to be a particularly appropriate way of ensuring a collaborative and co-ordinated approach to the delivery of the development needs of the Greater Exeter area. This functional geography reflects the travel to work area and housing market area. There are also considered to be potential cost saving benefits to the joint preparation of a plan. This report has been agreed jointly by Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council officers.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That Cabinet recommend to Council that:**

- 1. A Strategic Plan be prepared for the development of the Greater Exeter area intended to cover the period up to 2040 and that it be jointly prepared by East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils and Exeter City Council with the support of Devon County Council.**
- 2. A joint budget of £330,000 be established for the current financial year to fund the preparation of the necessary evidence base for the plan on the basis of an equal split of £70,000 per district level authority with DCC also contributing and holding the joint budget.**
- 3. A detailed scope, timetable, terms of reference, governance and staffing arrangements be worked up for a joint Strategic Plan and reported to Members at their next available meeting.**

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The Corporate Plan contains priorities of homes, community, economy and environment. Exploring collaborative working with other Councils on a sub-regional basis will enable enhanced delivery of these priorities.

**Financial Implications:** This report sets out anticipated costs associated with the production of a joint strategic plan. Costs of reports and studies to inform the evidence base for the plan would be jointly commissioned more widely than is currently the case. A joint budget is proposed for 16/17 with estimates given for this and future financial year. The cost of the examination of the joint strategic plan will also be shared between authorities. Any costs associated with staffing arrangements will be considered when these issues are addressed in a future report.

**Legal Implications:** Authority has previously been granted to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between 'Greater Exeter' Councils. The MOU is not intended to be legally binding although signatory Councils will use reasonable endeavours to comply with its terms, spirit and honour any obligations arising.

This report presents opportunity to work together in order to deliver a joint strategic plan across of the Great Exeter area. Local Planning Authorities have plan making responsibilities under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This Act includes provisions for joint plan making. The Localism Act 2011 also introduced a legally binding duty to cooperate between authorities. Other legal implications arising from decisions over terms of reference, governance and staffing arrangements will be addressed within future reports when decisions are made on these issues.

**Risk Assessment:** The main risk associated with this decision is the potential for money to be expended in pursuing a joint strategic plan which could be wasted if agreement cannot be reached and/or the plan work is aborted. It is however considered that given the duty to co-operate on plan making whether through joint work or otherwise this risk already exists to some extent and any abortive work will still be of value to work on separate plans in any event. Against this must be set the risk of future local plans failing their "duty to co-operate" without a clear agreed strategic plan.

From a Mid Devon perspective, there is also risk that work on a Greater Exeter area strategic plan will divert from the completion of the Mid Devon Local Plan Review. It is unusual for an authority to work on two plans covering different plan periods simultaneously. However the Local Plan Review will remain the top priority for the MDDC Forward Planning team and is expected to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate later this financial year. Accordingly, until the examination of that plan has been completed, Mid Devon will contribute financially towards evidence commissioning, but will be less of an active participant in terms of staff resources in comparison with the other Greater Exeter area councils.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Joint working between local authorities on planning matters has long been a principle of the planning system however it has taken on greater and greater prominence in recent years. The withdrawal of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and Structure Plans has made joint working essential to enable co-ordinated planning across the county and region. The introduction of the Localism Act 2011 introduced a legally binding duty to co-operate between authorities on the preparation of local plans which is encapsulated in paragraph 181 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states:
- 1.2 “Local planning authorities will be expected to demonstrate evidence of having effectively cooperated to plan for issues with cross-boundary impacts when their Local Plans are submitted for examination. This could be by way of plans or policies prepared as part of a joint committee, a memorandum of understanding or a jointly prepared strategy which is presented as evidence of an agreed position. Cooperation should be a continuous process of engagement from initial thinking through to implementation, resulting in a final position where plans are in place to provide the land and infrastructure necessary to support current and projected future levels of development.”
- 1.3 The preparation of current Local Plans has relied to some extent on the work of the RSS even though this was never formally adopted; however there is an increasing policy vacuum at the regional and sub-regional level that needs to be filled if there is to be appropriate co-ordination of how housing and employment needs are met across the area and infrastructure is delivered to support delivery. The NPPF and its associated guidance clearly points to this being achieved through joint working between authorities to an agreed strategy for their area. A number of local plans have struggled through examination where the Inspector has considered that there has not been sufficient co-operation between neighbouring authorities and the duty to co-operate has not been met. It is therefore an increasingly important issue for authorities to address. There is a good history of joint working between the Devon authorities including the joint commissioning of evidence to support plan preparation. In many respects a joint plan would be a natural progression of this work.

## **2. THE CASE FOR A JOINT PLAN.**

- 2.1 A joint plan has a number of clear benefits aside from simply meeting the duty to co-operate and the policy vacuum formed by the withdrawal of the RSS and Devon Structure Plan. The cross border co-ordination of issues particularly those associated with the growth of Exeter as the region's city is going to be key for Exeter and its neighbouring authorities. The impact of Exeter is felt beyond the boundaries of the city on a regional scale in terms of economy, housing need and transportation pattern. This area of influence has expanded to encompass East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. Together with Exeter

City itself, this wider area can now be regarded as 'Greater Exeter' and therefore there is a clear benefit of planning across functional geography.

2.2 Exeter is running out of space to accommodate the levels of economic growth that is envisaged and the housing needs that are likely to be generated. Significant growth is already being accommodated in East Devon in the form of Cranbrook, Science Park and Sky Park as well as in Teignbridge where large scale housing sites are being developed to the south west of the city. How such growth is accommodated and how this is co-ordinated between the authorities will be key moving forwards while regardless of which authority's area development is accommodated in there is a need to co-ordinate the delivery of infrastructure to support the development that is needed. Infrastructure such as the main road network for example runs between the different authorities and impacts on each area and so how the pressures that are placed on this infrastructure is dealt with is important to each authority and needs to be co-ordinated. Clearly Devon County Council also has a key role in terms of transport infrastructure, education and social care and proposes acting in a partnership role to support the Greater Exeter authorities in strategic plan making. Economic, environmental and other planning pressures and processes do not respect administrative boundaries and joint decision-making on these strategic matters will enable us to better plan for the future of the area.

2.3 A co-ordinated approach is also necessary when looking to secure government funding and investment. Individual authorities can no longer access the funding required to deliver the necessary infrastructure for large scale developments such as a new community like Cranbrook on their own. Such funding no longer exists with the government now expecting a co-ordinated approach between authorities and devolution bids to secure large scale funding. A joint plan will give a clear strategy for the area that will assist in accessing funding for infrastructure. In addition it would provide a clear strategy for growth to support the emerging devolution bid should this proceed. The Heart of the South West devolution bid highlights a number of challenges facing the LEP area which planning has a key role in addressing. These are:

- Comparative productivity is 29<sup>th</sup> out of 39 LEP areas
- An aging workforce and major skills shortages reported in every sector of the local economy
- Our performance remains low on key productivity measures: wages, innovation, inward investment exports and global trade
- Disproportionate growth in our older population is placing unsustainable burdens on our services
- Strategic infrastructure has good coverage, but is incomplete
- Insufficient capacity of the road network and motorway junctions
- Uncompetitive travel times to London and the south east

- Incidents and extreme weather threatens transport resilience
- Housing supply not keeping up with demand
- Threats to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

2.4 These challenges are common to the Greater Exeter area as they are to the wider LEP area and whether the devolution bid proceeds or not a joint strategic plan is considered to be part of the mechanism to addressing these issues that can only really be resolved by working together.

2.5 A further major benefit of joint working on plan preparation is the cost savings that this presents. Whilst traditionally some local plan evidence has been jointly commissioned, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (across the housing market area), a joint strategic plan would present an opportunity to take this further through the pooling of resources for the commissioning and preparation of evidence. This could lead to significant savings over individual authorities each making separate commissions or separately producing the work. There is also potential for skills and specialisms within the individual authorities to be shared for the benefit of the partnership.

2.6 Other authorities have already undertaken joint plan making and it is understood that many of the plans that are currently in production are being produced in partnership between neighbouring authorities. Examples that are similar to the proposed approach for the Greater Exeter area include a joint plan for the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury area and also a plan for the Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk Council's areas. More locally, joint plan making is already being pursued by North Devon and Torridge and is also taking place in the wider Plymouth area.

2.7 Joint plans are finding favour with local plan inspectors and the government's Local Plan Experts Group (LPEG) has also expressed a preference for this approach. The group was established in September 2015 to consider how local plan making can be made more efficient and effective. When the group reported earlier this year they highlighted the importance of joint working particularly in city regions where the administrative boundaries of the principal urban area mean that it cannot meet its housing needs. The Greater Exeter area is an example where this is increasingly the case and joint working will be necessary to address this issue.

### **3.0 GEOGRAPHIC AREA.**

3.1 It is logical for any plan to be centred around Exeter as the County city and so the geographic area for a plan needs to consider the influence of Exeter across the wider area. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) established a housing market area which takes in East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. Similarly the recently revised Travel To Work Areas also takes in

much of East Devon, Mid-Devon and Teignbridge and so there is clear evidence that the role of Exeter as a place to live and work extends into much of these adjacent authorities and any plan for the Greater Exeter area should include these authorities. Officers from Dartmoor National Park Authority have also been engaged in conversations and it is clear that the impact of growth in the Greater Exeter area on the park needs to be considered particularly the part of the park that falls within Teignbridge but it is not proposed that the park authority form part of the partnership.

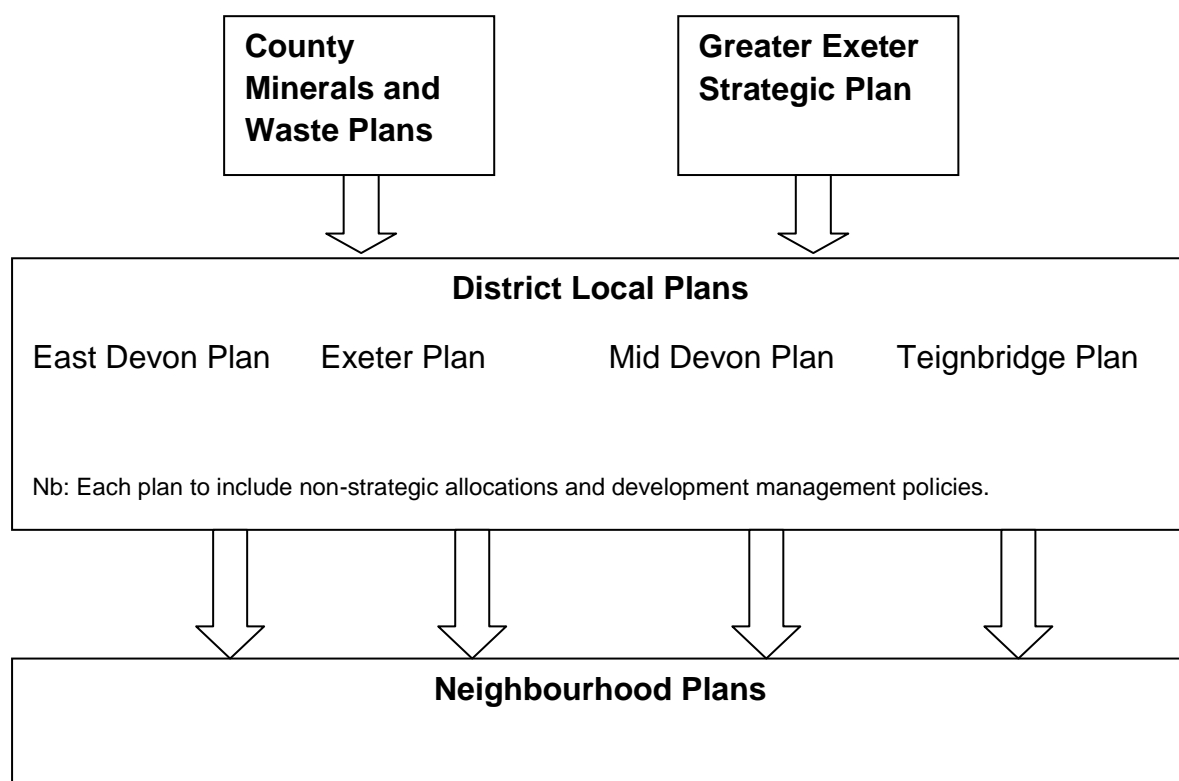
#### **4.0 SCOPE.**

4.1 There has been extensive discussion between officers on the scope of a jointly prepared plan and whether this should be a jointly prepared Local Plan which replicates the format and level of detail included in the adopted plans for East Devon and Teignbridge and the plan currently in the advanced stages of preparation for Mid-Devon. It is considered however that it is important that decisions are made at the most appropriate level and that having local level decisions about allocations in smaller towns and villages with no strategic impact or not directly influenced by Exeter would be better made at the local level and that a plan with a strategic focus would be most appropriate. It is therefore recommended that a joint strategic plan be prepared which would provide:

- A clear vision for the growth and development of the Greater Exeter area.
- Establish needs for housing and employment provision across the 4 authority areas.
- Make allocations for housing, employment and other development sites where they would contribute to the delivery of the vision for the Greater Exeter area and allowing for more detail in the area around Exeter. Any residual requirements would be allocated through separate local plans prepared individually by each council.
- Strategic planning policies in relation to the delivery of infrastructure across the area such as the delivery of highways projects, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANG's) etc.
- Provide more detailed policies on shared issues where consistency across the area is considered necessary or beneficial. For example renewable energies where the cross boundary co-ordination of district heating networks has already proved beneficial.

4.2 Such a plan is likely to still leave a need for a local plan for each authority, the production of which could follow on from the strategic plan or be produced in parallel, but the strategic plan would deal with the main large scale allocations and common issues leaving a slimmed down local plan to be prepared to address more local level policy issues and allocations. Clearly the strategic plan would also sit within a framework of plans which includes the County Minerals and Waste Plans and Neighbourhood plans for the area.

4.3 The envisaged hierarchy of these plans can be illustrated as follows:



## 5.0 TIMETABLE AND PLAN PERIOD.

5.1 Each of the authorities are at very different positions in terms of plan preparation and adoption and have taken different approaches in the past. Each authority's position is summarised in the table below:

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Status</b>
East Devon District Council	Local Plan 2013 – 2031 (adopted Jan 2016)
Exeter City Council	Core Strategy 2006 – 2026 (adopted Feb 2012) Development Delivery DPD (published July 2015)
Mid Devon District Council	Core Strategy 2006 – 2026 (adopted July 2007) Allocations and Infrastructure DPD (adopted October 2010) Development Management Policies (adopted October 2013)





LP consult																	
Submit LP																	
Examination Hearing days																	
Adopt plan																	
Financial year		2016/17				2017/18				2018/19				2019/20			

The above timeline is considered to be ambitious but even with some slippage should ensure that the plan covers a period of around 20 years at the time of adoption.

5.5 A more detailed timeline and work programme will be presented to Members at a future date as part of a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS).

## 6.0 BUDGET.

6.1 It is proposed that a joint budget be maintained to cover the costs of the production of the plan and that this be held centrally by Devon County Council. In order to commence the commissioning of evidence to inform the plan making progress a budget is needed for the current financial year from each of the partner authorities. It is considered that £330,000 would be sufficient to cover the evidence that is required to be commissioned in this financial year. This amounts to £70,000 per authority with the remaining £50,000 from Devon County Council. This money would primarily be used to commission evidence on the following main topic areas:

- Economic Needs Assessment
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Strategic Land Availability Assessment
- European Protected Habitats Assessments
- Transport
- Infrastructure
- Landscape
- Heritage
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Hazardous installations

- Open space needs
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Town Centre uses
- Viability

6.2 In the case of Teignbridge District Council it is understood that these funds have already been included within a wider budget for plan making work and will now simply need redirecting to a joint fund. The other partner authorities will need to specifically direct additional funds to the combined fund. A budget will also be required in future financial years which is likely to be in the region of £35,000 per year for the next 2 financial years with potential additional costs for the examination of the plan in the 2019/20 financial year. Importantly, examination costs are likely to be in the order of £100k but would be shared between the partner authorities.

6.3 It is recommended that the first year's budget is approved at this stage, to allow officers to commence work on the necessary evidence immediately, and avoid the potential for significant delay in the process later on.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION.**

7.1 It is considered that joint working on planning policy matters is vital to the delivery of a clear and coherent strategy for the future development of the Greater Exeter area and that this can only be delivered by the partner authorities working together on a shared strategy. A joint strategic plan focused on meeting the needs of the Greater Exeter area is considered to be the best approach to enable the partner authorities to reach agreement on how the needs of the area should be met.

7.2 This report is being presented to the four Local Planning Authorities individually recommending that they agree to this approach. It has been prepared by agreement of the chief planners (or equivalent post) of each of the councils.

7.3 Provision should be made for the budget recommended within this report for the commissioning of evidence to support plan production, in order to speed preparation. However issues such as staffing arrangements and governance arrangements are being discussed at officer level between the authorities and should agreement be reached on the principles established in this report then further reports will be brought to Members in due course to address these issues with a more detailed scope and timetable for the plan.

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**Background papers:**

Cabinet 16<sup>th</sup> May 2016 Joint working

- NPPF - <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/policy/>
- Local Plans Expert Group Report - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-plans-expert-group-report-to-the-secretary-of-state>
- Devolution bid statement of intent - <http://www.heartofswlep.co.uk/sites/default/files/user-1889/Heart%20of%20the%20South%20West%20Devolution%20Prospectus.pdf>

**Circulation of the Report:**

Cllr Richard Chesterton, Members of Cabinet