

Development and Planning Report to the NSC PC March 2025

1. The Government introduced changes to the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) shortly before Christmas together with revised mandatory targets for new housing. The aim is to streamline the planning process and kickstart a major programme nationally in the building of 1.5 million new homes by 2030. The Govt has increased the MDDC annual target for new homes by 67% from 329 as agreed in the Adopted Local Plan (2013 to 2033) to 572.
2. MDDC has received positive news that the Government will now find the money to build a new relief road around at Cullompton and the new exit junction on the M5 at Cullompton, following DoT approval is now on the Ministers desk. MDDC has not yet heard whether the scheme to build a new rail station at Cullompton has been reinstated. That also is with the Minister. On these major infrastructure projects depends the build out of the main phase of the Culm Garden Village and the contribution of up to 5000 additional homes over the next twenty years.
3. As a direct consequence of the Government's changes MDDC has made a new "Call for Sites". This is over and above the original "Call for Sites" done as part of the new "emerging" Local Plan in 2023. The latest "Call for Sites" will end on 14th March 2025 and will be followed by a formal and closed process of site evaluation by MDDC Planning Officers in consultation with Land Owners and Developers. This is called the HELAA process (Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment). There will need to be formal public consultation following the HELAA exercise but I am told that this is now unlikely to take place before Christmas 2025. It is not known whether local landowners and/or Developers will be submitting sites for consideration as part of the new sites exercise.
4. As a consequence I am told that the new "emerging" Local Plan is unlikely to be finalised for public consultation before 2026, one year later than the previous MDDC deadline for this work. Current work on the areas of the Plan not dependent on site identification and evaluation will continue.
5. I am also told that MDDC, with the increased 67% house planning approvals, will not be able to meet its five-year land supply targets beyond 2025. These are rolling annualised completion forecasts based on the existing Local Plan. If this trend continues it will leave Mid Devon increasingly vulnerable to speculative planning applications for sites not identified in the existing Local Plan and sites outside of designated settlement areas.
6. MDDC is now under immediate and increasing pressure to identify and develop new sites for housing. I expect this will mean the Council will seek to find ways, within new planning laws and regulation, to bring forward additional sites over the next year or two that are deemed suitable for development but which are not designated as such within the present Local Plan. This include possible sites within the three major towns and within the twenty two other Mid Devon villages with designated settlement (or planning) boundaries. These twenty two settlements include Newton St Cyres. I expect given new Government planning flexibilities some these new sites will be adjacent to as well as within the settlement areas.
7. I am told that the County of Devon is in Phase Two of the Governments plan to impose local Unitary Authority status together with directly elected Mayors on the remaining local authority areas with two tier structures. Phase Two of these changes is also targeted for 2028. Provided Mid Devon achieves its revised deadline of December 2027 the Plan Mid Devon will be inherited by the successor Unitary Authority.
8. Neighbourhood Plans that have been completed and approved (or 'made') before the approval of the new Local Plan will become a relevant policy determining document. However any existing Neighbourhood Plan may be superseded by policies in the New Local Plan.

9. The Neighbourhood Plan in NSC is currently on hold. This decision was made by the PC given the major uncertainties about the future of development and Planning both nationally and in Mid Devon.
10. **The Parish Council must now decide whether it wishes to reinstate the Neighbourhood Planning Process. I would counsel against resurrecting work on the Plan.**
 - a. A Neighbourhood Plan is a complex piece of work involving the systematic collection, analysis and presentation of views and evidence for change. I do not think we have the people locally with the motivation and time to do this work.
 - b. Even if we were to successfully produce a Plan for approval by 2026 we do not know how or whether it would survive the new Local Plan.
 - c. It is clear for the local engagement work already done in 2023/24 that the main reasons for a Neighbourhood Plan would be to identify, or to encourage, sites for "Green Space" designation and/or for the development of affordable housing. Both pieces of work would stand significantly more chance of success with the involvement and cooperation of landowners. This is very unlikely to happen.
 - d. Such projects would, in any event, have the potential to be controversial and to involve difficult consultation exercises which would require the intensive application of our resources. Again I do not think the Parish has an appetite for this.
 - e. I have consulted with various interested parties on the possibility of the PC and/or others taking a proactive role in working with MDDC and landowners to identify opportunities for the development for local affordable housing. I have detected little or no interest in this.
11. I propose that the PC consult MDDC on the process and evidence required to achieve the formal designation of the Recreation Ground and the Glebe Field as a "Green Space" within the emerging MDDC Local Plan.
12. In order to get this work done I propose that PC sets up a Green Space Sub Group that would take responsibility for the engagement and liaison work involved.
13. I propose that, for the time being, the PC engage in no further work either on the Neighbourhood Plan or on the development of affordable housing but, instead, engages with other local councils and with MDDC to understand changes to Planning rules and the emerging Local Plan.

Graeme Barnell
Chairman
Newton St Cyres Parish Council
March 2025