

Notes on a meeting to discuss the way forward on district and parish planning
held at Yew Tree Cottage, Hawkchurch, January 8th 2019

Present John Horrocks, Julie Baker, Tim Greenshields, Ruth Churchill, Roz Fox

1 Purpose of the meeting

At the parish council meeting in December 2018 we agreed to have this one off meeting to consider our position on whether to progress a neighbourhood plan two to three years after it was last looked at and in the light of new EDDC (draft) planning documents which may reduce or eliminate the need for such a plan.

The new draft planning documents are;

- The East Devon and Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines (2018) <http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2718201/east-devon-lca-draft-for-cmtte-sept-2018-low-res.pdf>
- The East Devon Heritage Strategy 2018 - 2031
<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/heritage-strategy/>

This group will report back to the parish council meeting on January 15th with recommendations on how to proceed - including proposed feedback to EDDC on the draft LCA (required by 4th February 2019) and on the Heritage Strategy (required by 22nd January)

2 Sources of information

Hawkchurch Parish Plan (2011)

Minutes of Neighbourhood Plan Steering group (January 2017)

East Devon District Council Local plan 2013-2031 (adopted in 2016)

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1772841/local-plan-final-adopted-plan-2016.pdf>

East Devon & Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment 2018 (draft for consultation)

East Devon Heritage Strategy 2018-2031 (draft for consultation)

3 Background

Hawkchurch produced a parish plan in 2011 and this identified a number of social issues of importance to the parish which were turned into an action plan which has since largely been implemented – most notably the introduction of the community shop.

Production of a Neighbourhood plan for Hawkchurch parish was discussed about 3 years ago. Some progress was made but it was concluded in January 2017 from the very limited responses to the associated consultation event that there was very little enthusiasm for progressing such a plan.

Residents do however clearly have strong views about inappropriate development as evidenced by the reaction to a number of planning applications related to electricity storage and generation.

Neighbourhood plans are more limited in their scope than the parish plans which preceded them. They only cover planning issues whereas parish plans covered social issues as well.

However neighbourhood plans do have the status of legal documents the recommendations of which have to be taken into consideration by EDDC and others when making planning decisions which affect the parish.

The question to be answered, two years on from the last time it was considered, is whether a neighbourhood plan would add any significant value to the district level planning documents which are now either in place or in draft form for consultation and expected to be adopted in the near future.

4 Consideration of EDDC planning documents, recommendations and conclusions

4.1 EDDC Local Plan

The EDDC local plan for 2013-2031 is considered to be a good and thorough document and a big improvement on previous versions.

There is little specific mention of Hawkchurch, which falls into the category of a smaller village, but the general approach to development is sound.

The smaller villages no longer have a defined built up boundary but there is also no allocation of specific sites or numbers of properties for development. EDDC will consider applications supported by strong evidence of local need but the type of development and its character is to be informed by the Landscape Character Assessment (p136) and in accordance with Design and Built heritage strategy (p147)

Hawkchurch is grouped with Axminster for consideration of affordable housing development.

4.2 Landscape Character Assessment

This is a draft document for consultation and feedback is required by February 4th 2019.

Hawkchurch parish lies in the area defined as the Wootton hills and by the LCA definition incorporates three main landscape types, 3A (upper farmed and wooded valley slopes) and 3B (lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes) and a small amount of type 1A, (open inland planned plateaux)

There are very clear landscape management and planning guidelines for each landscape type which we need to consider and give feedback via the parish council (see appendix 1)

These were however considered by the meeting to be thorough and well thought through and we had nothing to add.

Response to EDDC should be in the form of acceptance of the draft report and expectation that the landscape management and planning guidelines are adhered to.

Action Parish Council

4.3 East Devon Heritage Strategy (2018 – 2031)

This is a draft document for consultation which closes on January 22nd 2019

Hawkchurch is not mentioned in the document, although the history society is listed in the appendices. Julie and Tim confirmed that the society had not been consulted on or involved with the production of the strategy.

We note that the draft East Devon Heritage Strategy is the first attempt at producing such a document and probably because of this is relatively high level and lacking in local detail for the smaller villages.

Our recommendations for feedback are as follows;

1 Local list of assets

EDDC acknowledges that they do not yet have a formal local list of assets that is recognised by the council. However the strategy sets out proposals, working with local communities, for the means to establish and manage such a list.

Hawkchurch is a very historic village with many listed buildings and other sites of interest and we recommend supporting the production of a local list of non-designated heritage assets.

The parish council should work with the history society and other interested parties as well as with EDDC to produce such a list for Hawkchurch parish.

Action Parish Council and History Society

2 Creation of a conservation area in the parish

The heritage strategy appears to allow for the creation of new conservation areas and we should express an interest in pursuing this for Hawkchurch and be prepared to develop our thinking on the value of it as a longer term project in line with the strategy's action plan.

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4.4 Conclusions

EDDC planning documentation appears to have made great strides forward in recent years.

The Local Area Plan supported by the Landscape Character Assessment in particular seems to adequately reflect the known views and wishes of the majority of parishioners (based on the parish plan of 2011, the limited work on a neighbourhood plan in 2016-17, and responses to planning applications) in terms of the future development of the parish and surrounding area while maintaining its character.

If future planning applications are treated by EDDC in line with their own plans, then we have little to worry about in terms of unsuitable development and in fact can look forward to future enhancements to the area in terms of its maintenance and built character.

Similarly we have these planning documents to rely on when responding to unwanted developments and should quote the relevant sections when we need to.

Hawkchurch parish is not in any of the AONBs which surround us but by EDDC's description we are situated in the Wootton hills. We don't normally recognise this description of the area but it is a sufficiently descriptive and evocative name to be potentially useful in future discussions relating to possible country park status, new AONB boundaries etc, and also in responding to planning applications which don't fit in with the character of the area.

We recommend to the council that there is an initial discussion with the East Devon landscape architect re possible changes to AONB boundaries and future National parks.

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The group considered that at the present time we should focus on optimising the EDDC plans and following up on their actions rather on the production of a neighbourhood plan for Hawkchurch which would generate little if any extra value at the present time.

However it could be worth looking into the production of a neighbourhood development order (NDO) to be used in conjunction with the EDDC plans in order to define the location and type of any developments which might be proposed for the parish. We recommend that this option is investigated further by the parish council, initially by approaching the East Devon senior planning policy officer (Claire Rodway).

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Appendix 1 - LCA Landscape types relevant to Hawkchurch parish

Type 1A (open inland planned plateaux)

Description

This LCT occurs in the eastern half of the Study Area, and contains some of the highest land. It comprises a series of elevated fingers of land which are flat or gently undulating. The boundaries of the LCT are generally clearly marked by the transition to steep scarp slopes below (LCT 2A). This is a relatively simple landscape, with strong horizontal elements: flat horizons, straight roads and regular field boundaries. Vertical features, such as lines of roadside trees and electricity poles, are particularly noticeable. The simple landscape pattern reflects its late enclosure from common land. Settlement is sparse, and mostly occurs around crossroads, although there is more extensive 20th Century development associated with airfields. Archaeological features include prehistoric burial mounds, hillforts and beacon sites, and historic routes along ridge tops. There are occasional long views out over surrounding landscapes, particularly from the edges of the plateaux, some of which are associated with historic beacon sites.

What Makes this Landscape Special

A relatively simple landscape dominated by straight lines, often contrasting with the irregular patchwork of fields and wooded landscapes which surround it. Its high land forms the horizons in many views from the surrounding area. Important surviving archaeological features relating to prominent hilltop sites, including Farway prehistoric barrow cemetery, Culmstock Beacon and the Wellington Monument. Extensive heathland habitats at Gittisham and pockets of heathland and wet grassland elsewhere

Landscape Strategy

The simple, regular pattern of the landscape is retained. Skylines and plateau edges should be kept clear of intrusive development, and communications masts sited with care to have minimal impact. Biodiversity should be enhanced through continued positive management of heathland, grassland and woodland/ plantation habitats. Archaeological sites should be protected from erosion and damage, and key views from them should be kept open.

Landscape Management and Planning Guidelines

Protect

- Archaeological sites, taking particular care to keep earthworks clear of bracken and scrub.
- Skylines, particularly where they form the backdrop to views from a wide area. Plateau edges can be particularly prominent locations as they are seen from the valleys below.
- The relatively simple, regular landscape pattern.

Manage

- Viewpoints, enabling public access where possible, and ensuring that vegetation at the top of the scarp slopes does not grow too high and restrict views.
- Roadside avenues and hedgerow trees, replacing trees where necessary to ensure their continuity in the landscape.

- Woodland, identifying opportunities to link woodland, and also areas for potential extensive woodland planting using local seed. Retain and manage estate woodlands and coverts.
- Hedgerows, gapping-up where necessary to retain the landscape pattern and enhance habitat connectivity. Support local hedge laying groups.
- Areas of heath and wet pasture, removing encroaching scrub.

Plan

- Protect the rural character of skylines by keeping built development away from plateau edges.
- Create/ enhance safe public rights of way to enable access to sites of interest, and links with wider Green Infrastructure aspirations.
- Consider undergrounding overhead wires where particularly intrusive.
- Work with highways authority to control traffic speeds without intrusive signage.
- Respect the general pattern of settlement, comprising dispersed farms and dwellings, and hamlets around crossroads.
- Any expansion of larger settlements/ developed areas should include strengthening of development edges through sympathetic planting (e.g. beech hedgerows and avenues).
- Promote sensitive conversion of redundant farm buildings to appropriate new uses (e.g. affordable housing; small business units; tourist accommodation).
- Locate masts against a wooded backdrop where possible, or use planting to avoid them appearing as isolated features on horizons.
- Exercise care when selecting materials for industrial developments to ensure best integration into the landscape.
- Continue to ensure that solar farms are well-integrated into the existing hedgerow structure, and are not visible from above.
- Develop a long-term plan for conifer plantations reaching maturity, identifying areas suitable for replanting, or reversion to heath habitat.

Type 3A (upper farmed and wooded valley slopes)

Description

This LCT occurs in the eastern half of the Study Area, and also immediately north of Exeter. It sits between the wooded scarps and the gentler, more settled, lower valleys. This is an ancient and settled landscape, containing patchworks of irregular fields, woodland, winding lanes, scattered farms and small villages, often with square-towered churches. There are several small parklands and estate villages, and a high density of archaeological and historical sites. This creates a timeless quality and strong sense of history. Its pleasing compositions and distinctive landscape patterns created by hedgerows, trees and irregular fields inspired early C. 20th abstract artists. The Upper Farmed and Wooded Valley Slopes is relatively small in scale with an intimate feel. There are many attractive views within this LCT, and it also forms the foreground of views from higher land above

What makes this landscape special

Exceptionally high scenic quality, with landscape patterns visible from surrounding higher ground, and viewpoints within the LCT. This quintessential Devon landscape continues to inspire visitors and artists, and there is a sense of dropping-down into wide vistas. Dark skies are characteristic at night. Exceptional survival of archaeological and historical features, particularly from the medieval period. In many areas, the pattern of lanes, tracks, farms, villages and churches feels as though it hasn't changed in centuries. There is a rich built heritage of churches, houses, farms and farm buildings. Several estates, with associated houses, parks and estate villages.

Landscape Strategy

The historic fabric and existing landscape structure of small fields and woodlands should be retained and enhanced, so that the landscape retains its special 'patchwork' character and spectacular views. Wherever possible, agricultural practices should fit into the existing landscape structure and the impacts of any new buildings should be minimised. The LCT should be used for inspiring and educating the public, and telling the landscape story. Identify and protect areas of tranquillity and dark skies.

Landscape Management and Planning Guidelines

Protect

- The historic fabric of the landscape, and its settings, including (for example) churches, houses, farms, estates and archaeological sites.
- Historic farm buildings, exploring alternative uses for redundant buildings which retain their external appearance.
- The distinctive patchwork field patterns, associated with traditional Devon smallholdings and often dating back to the medieval period.
- The character of rural lanes, resisting pressure for unnecessary signage, particularly at the entrance to villages.

Manage

- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Promote traditional hedgerow management techniques, and repair gaps in degraded hedgerows.

- Woodlands, aiming to promote age and species diversity, using traditional techniques (e.g. coppicing) where possible. Link woodland blocks with copses and tree belts to improve habitat resilience. Encourage the planting of deciduous edges to conifer plantations. If necessary replace lost ash trees, using best practice guidance to identify locally-appropriate species.
- Grassland sites, promoting appropriate grazing to control scrub and maintain unimproved grassland, flushes and wildflower meadows.
- Historic parklands, including the planting of replacement parkland trees to ensure their continued presence within the landscape.

Plan

- Support traditional farms and farming techniques, for example by identifying and supporting new product markets and providing grants for projects which enhance landscape character.
- Develop Natural Flood Management techniques to control water run-off.
- Develop guidelines for the design of new/ re-purposed farm buildings, including consideration of lighting.
- Carefully consider the impacts of proposed development on upper slopes, as these sites are often particularly visible in wider views.
- Retain the pattern of small-scale settlements constructed of local materials. • Improve integration of new development into the wider landscape, specifically through characteristic landscape features such as hedges, earth banks and small woodlands.
- Where new dwellings are required, they should be carefully sited with regard to the traditional settlement form. For example, avoid linear development up the valley side above a nucleated village.
- Where appropriate, look to enhance the Public Rights of Way network in order to connect existing routes and create circular trails.
- Work with highways authorities to develop effective signage which minimises visual clutter and does not detract from historic settlements or village approaches.

Type 3B (lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes)

Description

This is one of the most extensive LCTs and can be found throughout the Study Area. It occurs on the lower slopes of the valley sides, and is generally a medium scale landscape, often with long views. It is predominantly agricultural, with pastoral and arable land uses (associated with distinctive red soils in the west of the Study Area). Patches of woodland, copses, and hedgerow trees give the landscape a well-treed character. It is a well-settled landscape, with farms, hamlets and villages (some of which have expanded). Villages are often centred on river crossing points and contain numerous historic buildings, often constructed of stone, and with church towers as focal points. Some villages have expanded to become larger settlements.

What Makes this Landscape Special?

An extensive LCT which forms the setting for many settlements, and also contributes to many expansive views from higher ground. A productive, working but still attractive landscape containing numerous historic and archaeological features. A diversity of settlements, with building materials and settlement pattern reflecting local geology.

Landscape Strategy

The landscape remains productive whilst retaining its landscape structure of hedgerows, woodland and farms. Alternative uses should be found for redundant farm buildings, and land uses should take place within the existing field patterns. Settlements thrive, and where they expand, this is done in a way which enhances their character and setting.

Landscape Management and Planning Guidelines

Protect

- Historic buildings and their settings. Where farm buildings are no longer required for their original purpose, consider alternative uses which retain their external appearance.
- Rural lanes, resisting pressure for widening or non-essential signage.

Manage

- Field patterns, by repairing degraded hedgerows, promoting traditional hedgerow management, and also retaining/ planting hedgerow trees. Replace lost ash trees with alternative species.
- Traditional orchards, supporting restoration where possible.
- Recreation, specifically game shoots, equine activities and fishing lakes, to ensure that facilities contribute to landscape character rather than detract from it. For example, through designing tree screening to match existing woodland/ hedgerow patterns, and using native species which are present locally.
- Woodlands, aiming for age and species diversity, and taking opportunities to connect woodland blocks. If necessary, replace lost ash trees using best practice guidance to identify suitable species.

Plan

- The location and form of any settlement expansion to be sensitive to existing road patterns and settlement form. For example, avoid ribbon development on the edges of nucleated villages.
- Retain distinctive entrances to villages (e.g. cuttings through sandstone banks) and consider how village approaches and entrances could be enhanced.

- Choose building materials which fit with the existing palette, taking particular care if considering bright or reflective surfaces.
- Consider settlements within their wider landscape settings. Ensure that appropriate measures to soften the settlement edge, and to integrate development into the landscape, are incorporated into any settlement expansion plans. Screening should enhance landscape character, for example through using fruit trees in traditional orchard areas, and avoiding stark lines of planting which do not respect the existing landscape pattern.
- Create stronger habitat links, particularly between woodland areas through additional woodland and hedgerow planting.
- Develop Natural Flood Management techniques to control water run-off.
- Where appropriate, look to enhance the Public Rights of Way network in order to connect existing routes and create circular trails.
- Consider the role of this LCT in wider views. It is often seen from above, so any developments spread over a large area (such as solar farms) are likely to be very apparent.