

HOLCOMBE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

www.holcombedevon.co.uk

Teignbridge District Council

14th June 2021

Dear Sir

Local Plan Review: Site Options (Teignmouth Road, Holcombe)

I am writing on behalf of the Holcombe Residents Association regarding the current consultation on possible site options for inclusion in the Local Plan. We have around 400 members in the village.

We appreciate that the Council has to find additional space for development so that it is able to demonstrate a five-year supply of new homes to meet Government set targets. However, we believe that the site identified at Teignmouth Road (between the centre of Holcombe and Southdowns Road) is not appropriate for development for the following reasons:

- 1) In the current Local Plan, this area is designated “Undeveloped Coast” and is also protected from development under Policy S17 which seeks a physical separation between Holcombe and Dawlish. There was a good reason for such a classification and policy, as these green fields characterise the coastal area and prevents “urban sprawl” along the main coast road. Indeed, the Independent Inspector who examined the current Local Plan, Geoff Salter, commented on the importance of the strategic green break when limiting the size of the current development at Little Leigh and the previous development at Southdowns Road (see paragraphs 50 and 51 of his report dated 9 April 2014).
- 2) Although all of the site cannot be developed because of the steepness of the slopes around the small watercourse that runs through these fields, the remaining “green break” would be very small. In effect, Holcombe would become just another part of Dawlish, losing its own identity with its rich heritage. Policy EN1 in the current Local Plan states that:

“Certain settlements are close together, and there is pressure to develop within the gaps. Where these gaps are important to their character or are themselves of high environmental quality, the policy indicates that this open character should be maintained.”

This is a key environmental policy and should not be changed. We would also point out that Policy S22 (settlements in open countryside) also prevents development in such areas except in exceptional circumstances.

- 3) On the same theme, building in these fields would extend the Dawlish settlement boundary. We note that despite pressure on the other side of Holcombe, the nascent Teignmouth Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain its settlement boundary to prevent coalescence between Teignmouth and Holcombe and to maintain a local green break.

- 4) The fields being considered are good-quality agricultural land and a haven for wildlife, including cirl buntings. We fail to see how development of this land, with over 200 new homes, can “offer an opportunity to improve wildlife habitats and corridors” as stated in the housing options consultation paper. If this area is developed, it will destroy the habitats of many animals and birds, some of which have protected status.
- 5) Holcombe itself lacks the necessary infrastructure to support such a large development. The nearest shops, supermarkets and GP surgery are some distance away. The “local” primary school, at Westcliff, is unlikely to be able to accommodate the demand for places. And no secondary school is within walking distance, the nearest being the other side of Dawlish. Although new cycleways might be put in place, the topography of the land means that there are steep hills to climb going in both the Teignmouth and Dawlish directions, making it unattractive for the casual cyclist. As a result, any development here will significantly increase the number of car journeys, with resulting emissions which will be detrimental to the Council’s climate change agenda.
- 6) We have concerns about drainage issues (can the watercourse cope with the run-off from such a large development) and road / access issues. On the latter, we assume that a new road from the A379 would be required, as access to the site from Southdowns Road or village lanes for such a large number of vehicles would be problematic. And if a new road was built, this would further impact on any remaining green corridor near the watercourse. We appreciate that access and road issues are not considered in detail at this stage of the Local Plan but we remain very concerned that the area around Holcombe, in particular the various lanes and residential roads, can take the increase in road traffic resulting from such a large development.

In relation to the other possible sites in the consultation, we are very surprised to see that land at Warren Farm is being considered, especially given its prominent coastal position and the controversy caused when this land was put forward for SANGS purposes. If Dawlish does have to take a significant number of new houses, sites to the north of the town seem the most appropriate, given that there is a large supermarket close by. In addition, land can be allocated for a new school, which will certainly be needed with the proposed number of new homes.

Yours faithfully

Andy Watson
Secretary, Holcombe Residents Association