



Exeter and East Devon  
Growth Point



## **Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Service Redesign & Capacity Building - DCLG**

### **Pilot Programme for Local Authorities**

### **Environmental work summary paper**

#### **Introduction**

The Local Authorities in the Exeter Housing Market Area (the HMA) have a strong record of working together and with other partners across administrative boundaries to plan for, promote, and deliver growth in an innovative way. The Local Authorities in what is termed the 'Greater Exeter area' are:

- East Devon District Council;
- Exeter City Council;
- Mid Devon District Council;
- Teignbridge District Council; and
- Devon County Council.

Alongside the involvement of the Exeter and East Devon Growth Point, the joint working of the Local Authorities has resulted in the development of the Cranbrook New Community to the east of Exeter, as well as large scale employment sites, all supported by significant transport, education and energy infrastructure.

This collaborative approach is set to develop further in the context of the devolution agenda which is emerging in the Devon area<sup>1</sup>. This will seek to establish a new, more formal joined-up approach to setting long term visions and development strategy across the HMA and travel to work area coupled with innovative mechanisms for development and infrastructure delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> Information available at:  
<http://heartofswlep.co.uk/about-the-lep/strategies-and-priorities/devolution/>

The Authorities recognise that redefining and redesigning the way in which the Local Authorities work together on local plan making will be a vital part of ensuring that collaborative work continues and evolves. As such, the Local Authorities are coming together to work on a joint strategic plan for the area – the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan - a project to which the Partner Authorities have recently committed. The plan will provide a strategic planning framework following appropriate functional geographies, allowing the Authorities to operate more efficiently. It will also be important in ensuring that the Partners comply with the ‘duty to cooperate’ placed on the local authorities through the Localism Act 2011.

The Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Service Redesign & Capacity Building support from DCLG has been a very helpful building-block in evolving the way in which the Authorities work together on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan, helping to front-load transport and environmental evidence and develop new working arrangements and support infrastructure for IT and mapping.

## **Work package**

A joint bid to the Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Service Redesign & Capacity Building fund was submitted by the Partner Authorities.

Total funding of £60,000 was awarded in February 2016 covering three elements to support accelerated strategic planning. The elements were:

- Environmental study work: £15,000  
To develop the environmental evidence base to support strategic plan-making and ensure the development of an appropriate strategy for accommodating future growth and environmental aspirations.
- Transportation study work: £25,000  
To develop the transportation evidence base to support joined-up plan-making and help develop a long term transportation strategy to support future growth.
- Redesigning data management: £20,000.  
To analyse, consolidate and achieve consistency across existing data sets.

This paper summarises the outputs of the environmental element of the work undertaken. The outputs of the transportation work and the redesigning data management elements of the work are considered separately.

## **Environmental study**

A number of the Local Authorities in the Greater area have previously collaborated on a mitigation strategy related to development impact on European designated sites. East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District jointly commissioned the South East Devon European Site Mitigation Strategy<sup>2</sup>. This strategy sets out the potential impact of development within existing Local Plans on the European sites and identifies a strategy for mitigating this impact.

In the context of the emerging direction relating to collaborative policy-making for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan, the Local Authorities and the Growth Point identified

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<sup>2</sup> Available at:  
<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.4-environment/env038a-footpringecologysedevoneuropeanmitigationstrategy.pdf>

the need to develop this work further. As such, an additional study was commissioned jointly to consider the period up to 2045 across the Greater Exeter area. This extends the geographic scope of the existing mitigation strategy to cover Mid Devon.

In advance of work to identify detailed housing requirements or the potential distribution of that development, it was agreed that a study was needed to help steer future policy decisions on development strategy in terms of European designated sites. This work has assessed the potential impact of theoretical development distribution scenarios on the principal designated sites through a series of pathways and then sought to compile a series of strategic intervention types which could be required to mitigate the potential impact of development. This work has been undertaken early and therefore can be used to steer emerging scenarios at the appropriate time. This means that impacts can be considered when progressing potential development scenarios whilst the implication of mitigation viability and delivery can also inform future policy decisions.

Because this work is being undertaken at the start of the process for preparing the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan there is a real opportunity to use it to direct the development of the Plan. This front-loading of evidence helps to ensure that critical environmental issues can actually drive future planning strategy. This approach contrasts with the traditional way of working through which the impact of potential development strategies is often tested *after* they have been developed.

## **Lessons learnt**

A series of lessons have been learnt by the Partner Authorities as a result of the environmental work undertaken through the DCLG funding. These lessons are predominantly related to:

- Partnership working; and
- Innovative thinking.

### Partnership working

The environmental work was commissioned jointly by Local Authorities, across both tiers of Local Government in the Exeter Housing Market Area, together with the Growth Point. Working together on the development of this evidence has allowed a series of open discussions to take place between Local Authorities with different responsibilities. This has improved the knowledge and understanding of the priorities of all parties and has allowed issues to be discussed and addressed early in the preparation of evidence to ensure appropriate outcomes are delivered. This has been of particular help in relation to the dynamic of County and District Authorities together with urban and rural Authorities. This has also been of significant benefit in terms of ensuring that one plank of the Duty to Cooperate is met.

In addition to partnership working between Local Authorities, it is notable how beneficial it is to hold discussions with key stakeholders such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and Dartmoor National Park Authority at an early stage of evidence gathering. Meetings were held to allow open discussions and debates to take place. Again, these early discussions have helped to engage stakeholders in the policy-making process, flag key issues and perspectives and build positive working relationships which can be taken forward as the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan

progresses. The outputs of the study will be made available to Natural England, the Environment Agency and other interested stakeholders as appropriate.

### Innovative thinking

The Local Authorities in the area have a good record of innovative approaches to delivering development, particularly through a varied and flexible approach to land acquisition and infrastructure delivery. The environmental study has developed this further extending innovative thinking into the field of preparing plan evidence, helping Authorities to think longer term across a larger area than previously.

Footprint Ecology, who undertook the work, employed an inventive methodology to consider the potential impact of notional development distributions in the context of the European sites. From this, it was possible to consider the scale of development which could have an impact on the designations through a series of pathways (for example, through loss of habitat, air quality impacts and water quality). This allows comparisons to be made between potential, future strategy choices.

The study also has a particular emphasis on habitat mitigation delivery. This delivery focus is particularly important given the legal requirement to mitigate impact of development on European sites and the potential cost of securing delivery. This emphasis links to emerging cross-boundary working on habitat mitigation which is potentially to be managed via a joint Committee.

### **Sharing of learning**

Officers from the Local Authorities will share the learning which has resulted from this work through relevant networks, via the Department for Communities and Local Government, to Defra, Planning Advisory Service, Royal Town Planning Institute and the Town and Country Planning Association.

At a more local level, there are specific examples of emerging cross-boundary plan-making taking place in the Plymouth and northern Devon areas where lessons here could be applied. Discussions could be initiated in the context of the existing Devon Duty to Cooperate Protocol<sup>3</sup> and through the Devon Planning Officers Group which meets quarterly.

The Authorities would be happy to hold discussions with interested parties to share widely the experiences gained to allow Authorities the opportunity to consider whether they wish to follow a similar approach to that taken in the Greater Exeter area with regards to considering habitat mitigation.

The report from this study will be made available in due course.

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<sup>3</sup> Available at:  
<https://new.devon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policies/the-duty-to-co-operate>

## Further information

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