

**(SHWD) Thriving Towns and Villages House
of Commons (Sarah Wollaston MP) (ID:
1002096)
PDF**

**Do you have any comments on any of the
supporting documents?**

Thank you for the detailed work that has gone into producing the draft joint local plan.

I am responding as the MP for Totnes.

I fully support the statement in the consultation:-

“Providing new homes offers the opportunity to improve the resilience of our rural communities, support our existing services and amenities and enhance the character of our towns and villages. New development also brings with it the opportunity for further investment in employment, community facilities and infrastructure, and this is particularly relevant in rural areas.”

Whilst local people recognise the need to improve the resilience of communities by making homes available for those who can the work in key roles in our schools and other services and allow young people to remain in rural areas of South Devon, there is great concern that properties end up being second homes and that housing remains unaffordable for local people. We need affordable housing and we need conditionality attached so that it remains affordable rather than provide a one off windfall to the first owner. There is great cynicism about developers promising certain percentages of affordable housing only to see this eroded in the final plans.

I welcome the inclusion of houses built since 2014 and those in development alongside windfall sites within the 8,700 figure but feel there needs to be greater clarity about windfall sites. Does this include single dwellings for example as well as exception sites?

Creating sustainable communities does mean allowing flexibility about developing village communities. The statement “In the countryside, smaller villages and hamlets outside a Development Boundary, we do not propose to make allocations through this plan. Instead, a criteria-based policy approach will be applied, allowing development only in sustainable locations which have reasonable access to services and transport options that avoid reliance on the private car. It is considered that this approach accords to sustainable development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.”

The reality is that people do use cars within the other locations listed for development and in my view, if a small community not meeting the usual criteria wishes to bring forward an exception site for affordable housing for local need they should not unreasonably be prevented from doing so just because residents would need to use a car as that is likely to be the case even if they lived in a neighbouring community.

I agree that neighbourhood plans should play an increasingly important role and agree with the statement “Neighbourhood Plans also pose a conundrum for Local Planning Authorities, as the LPAs need to be able to demonstrate where and when new housing will be delivered, but at the same time allow flexibility for Neighbourhood Plans to identify sites themselves. Given that it is not a statutory requirement for town and

parish councils to prepare a neighbourhood plan, nor is there a deadline for completion once a neighbourhood plan has been undertaken, the challenge of how to provide the most supportive environment for Neighbourhood Plans, whilst still providing the certainty over delivery of strategic housing numbers, will be a recurring issue.”

This is an issue the government needs to resolve as local people cannot control where development takes place if it is pre-set in the local plan. I support the proposal to allow village communities to decide where their own allocations should be located but feel this should extend to towns. For neighbourhood planning to have credibility this process must be left more flexible and in cooperation with neighbourhood plans where these are being developed rather than undermine them. Equally it would be a mistake for the local plan to allocate too many potential sites on the grounds that neighbourhood plans could then decide which to take forward as this process could lead to unnecessary stress for local residents. Already in the local plan there are sites set out which are clearly unsuitable and leading to great local anger for example proposals to build over the market area or other important local amenities in Totnes T3 central area

I agree that there needs to be greater practical support for neighbourhood planning and feel that communities may need different levels of support depending on local expertise.

The local plan documents contain very little information about the road infrastructure and its ability to support further development.

Traffic congestion and pollution levels are too high on the main roads through Totnes and narrow lanes throughout the South Hams struggles to cope with existing numbers, especially in the holiday season.

Communications to communities like Stokenham and Chillington will be especially vulnerable if there is further storm damage to the Slapton Line. It is hard to see how housing can expand further given the existing pressure on our roads and I would like to see specific mention of how this will be planned for.

Within the wellbeing section of the local plan I would like to see specific plans to encourage green infrastructure to expand an off road cycle network. This is necessary to allow people to feel safe cycling rather than using their cars and would not only help to reduce traffic and encourage green tourism but would improve health and wellbeing. There are many opportunities locally for this to be put in place but given that Devon as a county has been recognised for its cycling infrastructure, this has not been the case across the South Hams.

On specific local proposals I know that businesses and local residents alike are deeply concerned about the impact of any loss of parking within Salcombe as this is already at a premium.

The plans for the central area site in Totnes should be removed as this is a key amenity for the Town and loss of the market or Leechwell Gardens would have grave consequences. As for Salcombe, parking is already in short supply and this area should not be lost for local residents or visitors.

Likewise for Kingsbridge, car parking is necessary to maintain a thriving fore street and the plans to build on the car park are a serious concern. I strongly urge the local plan to recognise the importance of maintaining car parking in our towns, they are crucial to thriving high streets.

The plans for Stokenham and Chillington are simply incompatible, in my view, with the ability of local infrastructure to cope.

In summary

As the local MP I know we must do all we can to balance the need for housing for local people in order to sustain our communities and allow young people to live and work in the South Hams, whilst at the same time protecting and preserving our natural environment and landscapes. Whilst recognising the importance of tourism to our local economy, we do not need more second homes and I urge the local plan to make a commitment to prioritising affordable housing within the allocations.