

Comments from Clyst St George Parish Council in response to the draft Local Plan 2031-40.

As one of the Parishes impacted by the proposed location (option 3) of the “New Town”, we trust our carefully considered comments will be given due weight.

We are vehemently against **option 3 listed in the draft Local Plan**. Such an inordinately large development would swamp and ruin the historic medieval village of Clyst St George, changing its character beyond all recognition. We believe this proposal would reduce the quality of life of those living in the area by exacerbating pre-existing infrastructure issues and generating significant additional problems and concerns.

The detailed reasoning behind our rejections for this proposal of a “New Town” is wide ranging and stems from serious concerns with regard to the following:

Pre-existing Traffic issues - For at least three hours each day, the roads around Clyst St George are incredibly busy, particularly the A376 where crawling traffic clogs both Clyst St George roundabouts in the morning and late afternoon. This traffic situation deteriorates further during the summer months with the addition of thousands of tourist vehicles. Traffic on the B3179 is also considerable with queues of traffic tailing back and beyond Clyst St George during both morning and evening rush hours. The B3179 is already a busy and noisy ‘rat run’ used by a significant number of commuters each day travelling to and from Exmouth to avoid the congested A376.

Flooding of Roads - Both the B3179 and A376 currently suffer from significant flooding issues, particularly the former as seen during the recent storms. A light touch search of the internet provides many articles on both roads being impacted by serious flooding incidents on numerous occasions in the past five years. This flooding has, on occasion, caused serious traffic accidents. An increase in flooding would not only affect these local roads surrounding Clyst St George, but also the Topsham Road where excess run off from Cranbrook coming down the River Clyst has already added to significant issues in the last decade with increased erosion of the banks of the River Clyst threatening properties such as Fisher’s Bridge Mill and The Bridge Inn in the process. Run off from a second new town would put enormous pressure on the existing flood defence infrastructure and the historic bridge at Topsham.

Proximity to East Devon AONB and destruction of approach to Clyst St George - We believe any development built on the beautiful rolling farmland between Clyst St George and Woodbury would be detrimental to the western flank of East Devon’s Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which begins at national heritage owned Woodbury Castle. The Castle is located one to one and a half miles from the eastern edge of the proposed development and such a development would ruin the beautiful views to and from the Castle, and the stunning natural landscape between Clyst St George and Woodbury would be destroyed.

Change in Government Housing Target Policy - In December 2022 the Government abandoned mandatory housing targets enabling councils to take more control of how many houses should be built, where they should be built and when they should be built. We believe this policy change empowers and enables East Devon District Council to take a more realistic, targeted, holistic and 21st century approach to new housing across the district, thereby removing the requirement for a new town.

Employment: There are only very limited employment opportunities in the immediate locale of Clyst St George. Most current village residents commute in cars already and residents of a new town would be looking for employment in Exeter, Exmouth, the Science Park or Sky Park. This would mean commuting some distance thereby contributing to serious pre-existing traffic issues both in and around the village and the wider area.

Transport. Any residents of a new town would almost certainly commute by car (contrary to the NPPF). Existing roads such as the A376, A3052 and B3179 (Woodbury- Clyst St George) are already clogged with traffic at rush hours and both A roads lead to the congested Junction 30 of the M5. The other route into Exeter via Topsham is also extremely busy as traffic crawls through the built up area of Topsham onto the equally congested Topsham Rd into Exeter. The road network would be placed under even more significant strain should a new town be built in this area. The only safe way to reach Clyst St George village is by car: crossing the A376 and B3179 is hazardous for both pedestrians and cyclists and our public transport options are limited:

- **Railway:** The village's nearest station is Topsham, located approximately 2.3 km (as a person walks or cycles) from Clyst St George. Access to the station on foot involves crossing the dangerous B3179, A376 and Topsham Roads, all of which are extremely busy during the morning and evening rush hours. Moreover, parking at the station is very limited. Currently trains running on the Exeter to Exmouth line are two car DMU's and are already vastly overcrowded with commuters travelling from Exmouth.
- **Buses** - Whilst the Stagecoach route 57 does operate along the A376 and then into Topsham and Exeter, access to the bus stops entails crossing the B3179, the A376 and Topsham Road. There are no safe crossings for pedestrians (or indeed cyclists) across these busy roads at present which, once again, encourages the use of private vehicles. Other bus routes run very infrequently and are not suitable for commuters.

Education: Preschool and Primary education is provided by Lady Seward's School and Little Dragons on a site in the centre of the village. The site is small and there is no room to expand. The school is both well-regarded and popular, but can only accommodate 100 pupils. Any large scale housing development would very quickly necessitate a new site. With regard to secondary education, Exmouth, Broadclyst and Exeter are the options available, all of which require school transport and with many pupils wishing to participate in extracurricular activities this necessitates the use of private vehicles.

Shopping: there is no retail outlet for essential supplies in the village. Darts Farm supplies high quality food and gifts, but does not offer a comprehensive range of household groceries. The garage forecourt shop offers a limited range of essential goods, but pedestrian access is potentially hazardous due to the speed of traffic travelling along the A376 and access by car is the only realistic and safe option. The closest large supermarket is Tesco at Exe Vale, Sowton situated some three miles from the village.

Suitability of the area: The majority of the Option 3 development would be on clay soil. Surface runoff during rain events is already an enormous problem, consequently any development would require immediate and large-scale flood prevention work. The brook through the ford in the village already struggles to drain the area during storms and extended periods of bad weather and would completely fail should the proposed development go ahead. The potential pollution of local streams and rivers during bad weather is also of concern. (Please note previous comments on flooding)

Landscape and Boundaries. The southern boundary of option 3 has been drawn with little regard to landscape and completely ignores the boundary between Clyst St George and Ebford villages which has

existed for hundreds of years (the former appearing in the Domesday Book). At Ebford in the South Western section of Option 3, the boundary has spilt over a ridge to blight the settlement. The south-facing slope of the ridge is steep and would pose challenges to developers. Further East along this line on the map, the ridge continues as an obvious landscape feature (along the line of the B3179) and any built-up area would be visible across the rolling Devon countryside toward the Exe Estuary between Lypstone and Exton. This would be extremely poor landscaping in an area much loved by locals and tourists alike!

In summary

Clyst St George Parish Council is convinced that Option 3 is absolutely not the right option to address East Devon's housing needs. We are aware this has always been, and will continue to be, a difficult process for EDDC. However, we feel this particular proposal cannot be supported in any form due to the reasons detailed above. Car-dependent estates built on beautiful farmland in historic locations, (identical regardless of location) and which are not sympathetic to their surroundings will never garner our support. We will endeavour to argue the case for removing Option 3 from the table and revising the entire EDLP to reflect recent government policy changes.

John Manser

Chairman of Clyst St. George Parish Council

Approved by the Parish Council 11th January 2023.