

Neighbourhood Planning meeting

Thursday 11th June, Moreleigh Village Hall

Attendees

Caroline Voaden MP	CV
Cllr David Hancock (South Hams District Council -Lead Executive Member for Planning)	DH
Phil Baker (South Hams District Council - Head of Strategic Planning)	PB

Representatives of:

Aveton Gifford Parish Council
Bigbury Parish Council
Churchstow Parish Council
Dartington Parish Council
Dartmouth Town Council
Dittisham Parish Council
Halwell & Moreleigh Parish Council
Harberton Parish Council
Kingsbridge Town Council
Kingston Parish Council
Kingswear Parish Council
Loddiswell Parish Council
Modbury Parish Council
North Huish Parish Council
Ringmore Parish Council
Slapton Parish Council
South Huish Parish Council
South Milton Parish Council
Staverton Parish Council
Stoke Gabriel Parish Council
Strete Parish Council
Thurlestone Parish Council

Introduction by Caroline Voaden

Caroline welcomed attendees and explained the purpose of the meeting was to hear how national planning policy is affecting the South Hams on the ground, and to hear from local representatives about their own experiences.

The Liberal Democrats are not impressed with planning reforms, and MPs tried hard to push back against changes being brought in by Government. Gideon Amos MP, the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Housing and Communities – a chartered architect and town planner - put forward 35 amendments to the Planning and Infrastructure Act, but none were taken forward. The amendments focused on the need to protect local democracy and communities, pushed for a polluter pays principle, called for health and wellness to be prioritised, and for development to be community led.

The Liberal Democrats believe we need to build the right houses in the right place, including social housing. Affordable housing is needed, especially in South Devon where village schools are on brink of survival but available properties are not suitable for young families. Homes are also needed for older people to downsize, which would free up housing for younger families. People of all ages are needed in communities to support each other and maintain the sustainability and vibrancy of communities. Housing seems to be a blindspot for the Government – the ‘build, build, build’ attitude is not working.

Councils require additional funding to build social housing – they haven’t recovered from the loss of council houses, and it is difficult to replace stock, especially as the number of affordable houses on new build estates diminishes.

Caroline spoke about the possibility of Andy Burnham becoming Prime Minister – he has previously indicated support for affordable housing, so there is a possibility of change. The Liberal Democrats will be ready with demands for a new Housing Minister.

General discussion

1) Modbury Parish Council:

There doesn’t seem to be an overall plan, just housing targets with developers deciding where homes will be built. No consideration is given to transport issues, affordable housing and employment prospects.

There have been lots of complaints about the planning process with regards the new development in Modbury. The Parish Council commissioned a transport survey as Devon County Council’s was inadequate, which shows why access to the estate is unsuitable. The focus is purely on financials - South Hams is more attractive to developers because they make more money, but houses are not being built where homes are needed. Incentives should be given to encourage this.

Developers will put forward plans including the mandatory number of affordable houses, but then downgrade later.

Young people can’t afford to buy in Modbury and there is nothing to rent; older people are moving in so turning into retirement community.

Downsizing was considered when the Neighbourhood plan was put together – lots of people would like to stay in the community but existing properties are too large.

Parish Councils feel like they are in conflict with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) but they understand South Hams District Council (SHDC) are in a difficult position.

- a. CV: Infrastructure is a key point, and transport is crucial but not considered locally. The Liberal Democrats recently ran a campaign on the need for GP surgeries to be considered in new developments. ([No doctors, no development: Lib Dems call for a GP Guarantee on all new developments as surgeries strain under soaring patient numbers - Liberal Democrats](#))
- b. PB: LPAs have very little say in planning policy – they have fed back to Government many times on where meaningful development should happen, but haven't received a response.

2) Thurlestone Parish Council:

Is anything being done regarding existing permissions that are in place but homes are not being built? Developments are being forced onto communities that can't sustain.

- a. PB: Some developers get planning permission after planning permission but don't develop – the LPA can't control this.

3) Kingsbridge Town Council:

Kingsbridge is now an overspill for Salcombe holiday homes, and is being marketed as more affordable. Rentals are very expensive now, and nothing is being built in the 2 bedroom range. Young people are being forced to move further towards Plymouth, so the community is made up of older people and holiday makers.

Many planning permissions are to extend properties, going from 3 bedroom to 4/5 bedrooms. The Town Council have made representations to SHDC about the ratio of dwelling sizes – pushing for 2 bedroom properties in one housing development – but they voted against it. No developers are being made to provide smaller homes, so the community is losing manual labourers, shop workers etc.

- a. CV: We don't talk enough about homes being expanded and the fact we are losing smaller properties.
- b. PB: Wrote the policy on housing mix and agrees re smaller properties. Developers don't want to build 2 bedroom properties, and if the LPA refuses on that basis, the developer will win on appeal. The system is heavily skewed in favour of developers, and there is a lack of overall vision of what places should look like. Lots of small changes are eroding communities.

4) Loddiswell Parish Council:

What will the impact of Local Government Reorganisation be on planning and neighbourhood committees? Loddiswell is part way through developing a Neighbourhood Plan, but should they be more involved with the Joint Local Plan?

- a. DH: Unsure what future local authority will look like – could be one Devon, could be smaller. Structure is hard to predict but role of neighbourhood committees will be confirmed as we make progress. If larger authority for whole of Devon, would argue that local decision making is even more important. Aware of how much effort goes into producing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- b. PB: SHDC will be starting the Joint Local Plan process soon, with consultations running over the summer. They will engage with Parish Councils about the vision for local areas.

- c. Modbury PC: There is scepticism about how much effort to put into engaging with the new process due to problems with existing plans. Policies in their plan are not taken notice of in local applications.

5) South Milton Parish Council:

They allocated a site in their Neighbourhood Plan to ensure affordable housing - a mixture of self build, affordable housing and open market - with lots of support from within the community. The allocated site is now being put forward for Outline Planning Application – will the new NPPF affect that?

- a. PB: Unsure what new NPPF will look like, but the 2025 draft includes lots of big policy changes. Changes are unlikely to affect current planning applications, but can't provide any certainty.

Lots of other designations in South Milton which will provide protections.

The draft NPPF is very badly written and contradictory - seems like each page was drafted by different person.. One policy says that infill is permitted where there is existing development – indicates you can build what you want.

Government don't seem to understand difference between housing demand and housing need.

Staverton's Neighbourhood Plan is the only one in South Devon which is safeguarded, as it written within 5 years and they allocated housing. Other plans have some policies that will apply, but not regarding housing allocations.

6) Dartmouth Town Council:

There is limited space for development but policies within the Neighbourhood Plan acknowledged the need for downsizing. A housing needs assessment was included within the plan which was submitted to SHDC, but this has been ignored. Frustrated that SHDC have been dismissive and ignores the NPPF Paragraph 14.

- a. PB: There is a technical difference between housing requirement and housing needs assessment.

Technical requirements need to be met, and only Staverton meets all three requirements of Paragraph 14.

It is disappointing for all that numbers have changed and impacted Neighbourhood Plans.

7) Strete Parish Council:

They have done a brief review of the Neighbourhood Plan and has spoken to Phil on various occasions. No landowner is interested in development in Strete, so even though they're broadly in agreement, what do they do, as their Neighbourhood Plan doesn't meet requirements.

- a. PB: There are lots of designations in Strete too so likely protected. Might be able to get protection under Paragraph 14 if no landowners will put forward sites. Once the next JLP reaches a certain point, they will be able to give Neighbourhood Plans weight again.
- b. The Government's housing requirement for the South Hams is over 900 homes per year. The West Devon requirement is 450 homes per year. We have never built anywhere near that number of homes per year, partly as developers don't want to build. Most homes have been built in the urban fringe (ie Sherford) as

towns and villages are never going to yield that number, but the algorithm doesn't take many important points into account.

- c. DH: A calculation linked to average house prices and salaries shows how many houses are needed to meet the demand. The number for Salcombe will be high as the affordability gap is huge, and areas where you can't build due to other designations will impact other areas.
- d. CV: Liberal Democrat MP Andrew George will put forward a Private Member's Bill on the subject of housing and second homes, which will be a good opportunity to speak about impact of second homes on land prices and availability of supply.

8) Bigbury Parish Council:

Have any local authorities successfully challenged the housing figures given by Government?

PB: All local authorities have to wait for legislation to come out before starting to plan. About 100 are all in the same position so difficult to learn from each other. They have had an informal discussion with the planning inspectorate but they couldn't give firm guidance. Local authorities are following a 30 month process with set steps, where they can test ideas.

Government are starting to suggest capping land prices in the greenbelt. If land values could be capped in rural areas too, it would be easier to bring forward applications. The current market is skewed against delivering the houses that are needed.

The only area with a lower housing figure than expected is Greater London.

9) Ringmore Parish Council:

There is a lot of unreasonable criticism of second homes, but second homeowners bring a lot of value to the area. What are the economic benefits of second homes being removed from an area? Wales is suffering in areas where council tax premiums have increased. People are unable to sell their property and local people can't afford to buy.

- a. CV: Second homeowners who regularly visit, eat and employ local people are valuable, but objection is to the number of Airbnbs that remove properties from the rental market, and second homes that are left empty for the vast majority of the year. Some second homes are unsuitable for local families but others are ideal and sit empty.
- b. DH: The impact of second homes on the South Hams is substantial. This can be seen in declining full time populations, for example leading to the closure of Kingswear Primary School. Based purely on economic activity the impact might not be huge but the social impact is considerable. SHDC have seen a significant boost in council tax revenues from the council tax precept, although the majority of funding goes to DCC.

10) Harberton Parish Council:

Outline Planning Application for development in Harberton was just refused 5 votes to 2. Heritage (including church visibility) and pedestrian access to site were factors considered. Harberton Neighbourhood Plan was considered as part of the Development Management Committee meeting, despite not being adopted.

11) Dartington Parish Council:

Hopes new Joint Local Plan will use the work carried out for Neighbourhood Plans.

Dartington have worked on their plan for 14 years.

South Hams District Council enforcement officers are not doing what people expect them to do, so residents feel a lack of representation. Current work is money and numbers led.

12) Slapton Parish Council:

Enforcement is an issue in Slapton, with people building what they want without planning permission. The enforcement team don't enforce. Work is done without a planning application, they are reported but put in an application which closes down the enforcement

team's action, then get away with it. Work should be shut down as soon as the enforcement team become involved. People pay lots of money for surveys etc when applying for planning permission, but those who don't apply and just do the work anyway don't carry out these surveys. Fines should be levied.

- a. DH: Enforcement teams are rigged to lose due to a lack of money and lack of power. There is always an advantage for people who just get on with it. Would love to put more money into enforcement, but in difficult position financially. £2.5m cut to SHDC budgets this year.

There are safety issues for some enforcement officers – they can't attend some properties without police.

13) Thurlestone Parish Council:

New policies don't mention some environmental protections such as National Landscapes, although there are good protections for National Parks.

- a. CV: Will look into.

(This came up in a question to the Housing Minister on Monday 14th June - see [here](#). They were quite location specific but it is being raised and I will write to the Minister about it more generally.)

14) Kingsbridge Town Council:

Second home council tax premium precept for Kingsbridge has gone towards buying flats for emergency housing.

15) Harberton Parish Council:

Is there an update on the new NPPF? The Development Management Committee meeting referenced several points in the new NPPF.

- a. DH: A draft NPPF was published in December 2025. A consultation was carried out, and the final version is due to be published in October 2026.