

## BRIEFING NOTE FOR MEETING WITH EDDC ON 24<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2011

### “PLUMB PARK”<sup>1</sup>

#### Littleham, Exmouth and Sustainable Development

Of all the proposed sites the Littleham site (SHLAA reference W079) is closest to all of the town centre, seafront, major public transport hubs and major employment provision. These facts, which are supported by our evidence, show that if Exmouth has any aspirations to be a self-sustainable town then this allocation should be favoured over all others.

To amplify, taking the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development<sup>2</sup> and holistically applying that to Exmouth, Littleham is without doubt the most sustainable location to meet the required housing for the town because it would:

- *future proof agricultural activities around Exmouth, and in particular the Maer Valley, helping to protect the hinterland, which is labelled with national environmental designations, in perpetuity;*
- *lead to biodiversity gains (maize fields do not encourage biodiversity where well planned housing, open space and green infrastructure could);*
- *deliver housing in tandem with, and close to, employment land at Liverton;*
- *help deliver the Highways Agency's, District's and Town's visions' of reducing the movement of those living in Exmouth outside the town for employment (and retaining higher skilled and younger people in employment in the town) and in terms of movement around Exmouth provide the opportunity for highly ambitious modal splits by providing vanguard green infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling, all helping to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels;*
- *in line with the number one priority for the District Council, provide up to 200 affordable homes in a town where the greatest need for such exists helping to maintain balanced communities;*
- *deliver highly sustainable housing to at least Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 reducing energy requirements at a time when costs for non-renewable energy sources are predicted to continue to rise for the foreseeable future.*

### I. Current situation:

After the last LDF meeting on 11 October, when the Town Council's proposal for the Littleham Valley area was agreed, the Estate has been re considering its master plan and considering how it should best respond. The Estate is disappointed that many years of work, much of it in alignment and supported by East Devon District Council (evidenced in Council meeting minutes and public documents from 2009 onwards) was overturned at a meeting where evidence and facts appeared to be secondary to unsubstantiated claims and political expediency. We felt that with such

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<sup>1</sup> Plumb Park is one of the original field names included within the site near Littleham proposed by the Estate for development.

<sup>2</sup> The Brundtland Commission coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

important decisions being made the lack of opportunity to effectively challenge and respond to these claims, or allow professional input from officers and advisors in the public meeting, was extraordinary.

## 2. Estate ambition:

As a local land, property and farming business, with a long term stake in the future of Exmouth, the Estate, since 2008 has been very carefully and diligently working up proposals and objectives in respect of this site. We take a generational view of all our operations and investment decisions.

Overall, our ambition is sustainable development. This means development which improves human well-being for both current and future generations of the town.

In terms of delivering true sustainable development the debate often revolves around current generations needing to accept change to deliver benefits for future generations. The importance of "taking people with you" and the political realities of such change is often overlooked and the Estate accepts that this area is perhaps where more work is needed to ensure a result which is understood and accepted by the current community.

## 3. Specific objectives:

We have supported the District Council throughout the lengthy ongoing LDF process and our objective has been always to ensure that what is proposed on Estate land is both sustainable and deliverable. At the beginning of the process we were informed that over 2,000 new homes were to be required over the plan period, we now understand it is to be less than 1,000. Our approach has never been about numbers of houses. It has always been about the right number in the right configuration on the right site. We believe that there is wide ranging and compelling evidence supporting this site as the most sustainable one for Exmouth. The Estate has been encouraged to invest time and resources over three years to help bring this site forward. Over £130,000 has been spent to date. This highlights the **very professional and serious approach** we have taken to proposing the development of the site. Our thoroughness contrasts sharply with the approach taken at the LDF Meeting on 11 October.

One of our aims has been to leave a legacy for which future generations will thank us. This includes careful siting of properties, retention and enhancement of key landscape features and master planning which **responds to existing development and local ambitions**, including the Avenues Design Statement.

In order to support our wider economic and employment objectives within Exmouth we are keen to **help meet the high demand for affordable housing** by providing accommodation for many who could well be working in Estate owned business premises or for the Estate itself in the future.

We see the development as an **opportunity to provide capital for investment in our Exmouth based employment and commercial premises** at Liverton 1, 2 and 3 (as the latter are developed) and elsewhere. These investments are important to help deliver both the District's and the Town's visions of reducing the movement of those living in Exmouth outside the town for employment and retaining higher skilled and younger people in employment in the town.

Importantly, our original development proposal in the Draft LDF, prior to the decisions taken at the 11 October meeting, would have provided **sufficient capital to enable the restructuring of farming operations in the Exmouth area** to both future proof agriculture in terms of

competitiveness and also ensure the necessary compliance with current and future environmental legislation; for example the EU Nitrates and Water Framework Directives. Our plans included rationalisation and investment to reduce the possibility of diffuse pollution and improve scale to enable compliance with likely post 2013 Common Agricultural Policy environmental management requirements. With a reducing Pillar One payment, farms will need to increase core profitability as well as improve environmental compliance. This is of acute importance to Exmouth, not least because of interest in bathing and drinking water quality.

#### 4. Our Approach and what we know:

Our approach throughout our work on this site has been evidence based.

It is as a result of the evidence we have gathered that, over time, it has become clear to us that the “Plumb Park” site near Littleham is the most sustainable of all the major sites put forward over the past three years.

We know that the **Devon Bio Diversity Records** show no important species or habitats on the site. Indeed there are more species of interest in the gardens of Douglas Avenue than the fields forming the area of the site.

We are aware that the **Highways Agency** have no objections to development on the site. Their view is that, being in close proximity to the town centre, the site is very sustainable from a highways perspective (presumably to reduce outward bound trips through Junction 30 of the M5 which is already at, or very near, capacity). The site is the best of all current options, in terms of access route choices, once traffic has left the site.

We are aware that **South West Water** have not raised any objections to the site or expressed concern that any capacity constraints of existing sewage systems may occur during the development's roll out to 2021 that cannot be addressed by a developer's contribution to infrastructure investment.

Our work on design has enabled us to site the development within the contours of the land. It will hardly be seen. **Landscape impact will be minimal** compared to other schemes.

All public and permissive (ie granted by the Estate, of which these form the majority) rights of way will be maintained. The Estate does not intend to extinguish any of the permissive rights, indeed, it intends **to increase access** and make it more joined up with the inclusion of the higher ground open space and new linear routes. This will provide links into the new community development and existing developments, benefitting a much wider number and range of people.

### Choices

Following the meeting of the LDF Panel and the decision taken to remove our proposal the Estate is considering its options. We believe that the choices include:

1. *Work with all key stakeholders to reach a compromise position of 350 homes to comprise a sustainably designed development with vanguard green infrastructure, improved biodiversity, affordable housing provision and social and community infrastructure which would result in all of the aforementioned sustainability gains, not least future proofing farming and investment in employment land in and around Exmouth.*

2. *Work up a master plan which accommodates around 190 homes on the Littleham Valley site proposed by the Town Council and agreed in principle by the LDF which would compromise the quality of development and the sustainability gains alluded to above.*
3. *Continue to promote our original scheme for 500 homes (or maybe promote more) throughout the Core Strategy process and to EiP. This could be done in various ways including looking into the Council's approach to its spatial distribution of housing numbers, the allocation and location of housing numbers in Exmouth, and the deliverability of all other sites and infrastructure across the district and in Exmouth. Given that windfall sites are not to be included in Core Strategies and that the Core Strategy now proposes 540 dwellings for Exmouth, the Town is being asked to provide 3.6% of the growth when it currently houses 25% of the population of East Devon in a town where planning permission exists for major employment schemes. All of this suggests there are strong grounds to pursue such options should we choose to do so.*

#### 4. Preferred Approach

Our preferred approach is to **work in partnership with all key stakeholders** including the District and Town Councils and identify a more sustainable solution based on the Town Council proposal but which allows for some flexibility on the boundary and enables an increase in the number of dwellings to 350 and the provision of a significant planning obligations package comprising social and community facilities, and well considered landscape plans, providing access to open space and improvements to the linear permissive rights of way. This revised proposal would take the best out of our original submission and reflect the desire of the Town Council to limit development. If agreement can be reached on such a proposal and it is included in the LDF, **our commitments would be:**

- *To fully endorse EDDC's Core Strategy approach right through to EiP in terms of spatial distribution;*
- *Not to test EDDC on housing land supply*
- *To fully endorse the housing allocation for Exmouth right through to EiP;*
- *To hold a series of professional consultation events involving all key stakeholders including EDDC, ETC, Ward Members, and local residents throughout the master planning phases.*

#### 5. Governance

The Estate executive management team support this preferred approach and, depending on the level of support from the District Council, will recommend this to our Board of Trustees at our Board Meeting on 2 and 3 November 2011, when our future policy on this site will be agreed.

John Varley, Estates Director, Clinton Devon Estates  
20 October 2011