

Notes on Housing Issue in Tavistock

Prepared by Cllr Parker at the request of Full Council September 16th 2025

Recommended that TTC invites representatives of WDBC along with members and advisors of the former Tavistock NDP Steering Group to discuss ways of working together to resolve key issues facing Tavistock, enabling new housing development to contribute positively to the quality of life and prosperity of the town.

1 Key issues

- 1.1 There are three matters of increasingly urgent importance to the town of Tavistock:
1. The total amount of additional housing required in Tavistock in the next 10 years
 2. The provision of affordable housing in Tavistock in the next 10 years
 3. The infrastructure improvements required to accommodate this additional housing.

2 Additional housing likely to be required in Tavistock in next 10 years

- 2.1 The NPPF contains a provision, at paragraphs 69 and 70, for the Town Council to request WDBC to provide an indicative figure for housing in the Neighbourhood Plan area. This would be a good practical starting point since there is currently real confusion about what the requirement is likely to be – other than that it is likely to be extremely large. The background is as follows.
- 2.2 The Tavistock Neighbourhood Plan states that there is no case for additional housing sites in Tavistock during the plan's lifetime.
- 2.3 However on July 30 2024, the Government published new a housing requirement of 426 per annum for the whole of West Devon. This was confirmed in the revision to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024.
- 2.4 Also on July 30 2024, the Town Council chose to press forward with the Neighbourhood Plan and to have it assessed under the 2023 version of the NPPF. Consequently, the adopted version of the Neighbourhood Plan does not take the new 2024 housing target into account. The Neighbourhood Plan Assessor advised us that, in such circumstances, **"Plans may ... need to be revised to reflect policy changes which this framework has made"**
- 2.5 We now know that the Neighbourhood Plan's conclusion that there is no requirement for additional housing sites is out of date, wrong and misleading. Taken together with the fact that West Devon does not have a 5-year housing land supply, we need to be mindful of what the Independent Examiner told us about such a situation - **"it may result in speculative applications in locations which are not considered appropriate and these could be successful if the local planning authority has an inadequate housing land supply."**
- 2.6 This is precisely the situation in which Tavistock currently finds itself.
- 2.7 In the light of this, the Council might consider a revision to the Neighbourhood Plan updating it and setting out how much additional housing is likely to be required during the lifetime of the plan. The likely scale of this additional housing is currently uncertain but:
- The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group's Artificial Intelligence Chat Bot assesses that between 1800 and 2200 new homes can be expected to be built in Tavistock in the next 10 years.
 - Currently 1280 new homes are *already* planned or committed within the Tavistock Neighbourhood Plan boundary:

- 350 have extant planning permission at the Tors (i.e. 'extant' means that permission can't lapse because development has commenced).
- 250 are allocated in the JLP at Plymouth Road
- 330 at Butcher Park Hill are the subject of pre-application discussions
- 150 to the north of Callington Road are the subject of pre-application discussions
- 200 in 2 phases at New Launceston Road are the subject of pre-application discussions
- As pointed out at 2.1 above, the Town Council has the ability to request WDBC to provide us with the necessary requirement.

3 Affordable Housing required in Tavistock

- 3.1 The Aecom Housing Need Assessment (HNA) prepared for the Neighbourhood Plan assesses that Tavistock will need 841 Affordable Homes in the period to 2034 (324 for rent and 517 as a route to ownership).
- 3.2 The HNA assumes that 358 Affordable Homes have been provided through developments already granted permission, leaving 483 still to be provided,
- 3.3 In reality, however, as a result of variations agreed by WDBC, only 161 affordable homes have been secured by committed developments, as follows:
 - 12 in the Brook Lane and Trendle developments
 - 44 in Embden Grange
 - 37 in Broadleigh Park
 - 68 in the 399 homes built at the Tors
 - Amazingly, *none at all* in Little Orchard
- 3.4 Thus, there appears to be an outstanding requirement for 680 Affordable homes (of all types) in the next 10 years.
- 3.5 It is evident that there is not enough land within the built-up area of Tavistock to provide this amount of affordable housing along with its 'enabling' open market development. The vast majority of development will, therefore, need to take place outside the built-up area, on what is known as 'rural exception sites'.
- 3.6 There are two major routes to developing rural exception sites. These are supported by the government, the JLP and, most recently the report of the Devon Housing Commission, established by the Devon Housing Taskforce (chaired by Councillor Mandy Ewings):
 - The NPPF, amplified by JLP Policy TTV27 enables development outside the built up area which is adjacent to a settlement, provided that it meets local housing needs and contains no more than 40% open market housing.
 - NPPF paragraph 76 encourages local planning authorities to support the development of exception sites for community-led development (e.g. via Community Land Trusts)
- 3.7 The intention of the JLP had been that 'built-up areas' should be defined by Settlement Boundaries which could be identified in Neighbourhood Plans. However, although WDBC supported such boundaries in other Neighbourhood Plan areas, officers adamantly opposed a boundary for Tavistock, leading to confusion as to what constitutes the 'built up area' or 'adjacent to the settlement'.
- 3.8 Furthermore, WDBC (perhaps acting beyond their power) has adopted a Supplementary Planning Document that negates the use of exception sites in Tavistock by, effectively, disapplying policy TTV27.

- 3.9 If the Town Council wishes to maximise the delivery of Affordable Housing to meet the community's needs, then it is imperative that all elements of the rural exception site policy be reviewed, rationalised and amended – possibly by amending the Supplementary Planning Document or reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan.

4 Infrastructure requirements in Tavistock

- 4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan identified a range of infrastructure requirements for the town including Environment, Affordable Housing, Transport and Community facilities. Some of these were included as specific S106 requirements in the plan.
- 4.2 The JLP also identified a range of S106 requirements. Some of these were to be funded through specific developments whilst others were to be applied generally to developments in the district. Some have been acted on consistently (especially the rail contribution) whilst others (such as bus, health and school contributions and affordable housing) have been acted on haphazardly or, in some cases, not at all.
- 4.3 Two factors are important to note:
- The JLP infrastructure requirements were based on information and priorities identified almost 10 years ago
 - The Neighbourhood Plan infrastructure requirements were based on the understanding that there would be no need for additional housing development in the town.
- 4.4 It is now understood that there is likely to be a significantly large amount of development over the next 10 years. No assessment has been made, either through the JLP or the Neighbourhood Plan of the likely impacts of such a large amount of development on the infrastructure of Tavistock or of the priorities that should be attached to dealing with such impacts. For example:
- on the road infrastructure of the southwest of the town in the light of developments being proposed at Callington Road, New Launceston Road and Plymouth Road
 - on the priority for constructing a new primary school
 - on the impacts on primary health care
 - on the provision of local employment and training
- 4.5 The absence of up-to-date infrastructure planning is already being felt in the town and members are already being contacted by concerned residents. Members may feel that these issues are too important to be left to case-by-case consideration and that requirements should be updated in the light of current knowledge.
- 4.6 Members may feel that a measure of forward planning of infrastructure is necessary. This would indicate a need for cooperation between DCC, WDBC and TTC and the involvement of the community and organisations of Tavistock and national interests such as WHS and Historic England. It will almost certainly require updates to, or new versions of, the Supplementary Planning Document, Devon County's Infrastructure plans and or the Neighbourhood Plan.