

Chapter 1. Introduction and background.

1.1 PREAMBLE

This Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is the plan for the two West Devon parishes of Bridestowe and Sourton, and represents the communities' vision and priorities for how **we** would like to see the local area change in the coming years. In doing so it sets out our local planning policies which will be considered as and when any proposals for development come forward in either parish.

The Plan is not intended to cover every issue identified as being important to the communities. It has a focus on responding to proposals for development and the appropriate use of land. It puts us, as the communities, in the driving seat when it comes to having a say over what, how and where development should take place where it requires planning permission.

The Plan and its policies reflect our parishes' characteristics and the ambitions of our communities. The non - planning issues that arose from the consultation have been included in Appendix VIII (Community Aspirations). The two Parish Councils are committed to addressing these aspirations although some may not be deliverable at a parish level.

A list of the various reference documents referred to in this plan can be found in Appendix II and on both Bridestowe's and Sourton's websites.

The Plan covers the period from 2016 to 2034, running concurrently with the Local Plan produced by West Devon, South Hams and Plymouth Councils and current policies and plans of Dartmoor National Park Authority, as the local planning authorities.

We recognize that our NDP is a response to the needs and aspirations of the local community as understood today and current challenges and concerns are likely to change over the plan period. Bridestowe Parish Council, as the Qualifying Body, will be responsible for maintaining and periodically revisiting the Plan to ensure relevance and to monitor delivery.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PLAN

Bridestowe and Sourton are adjoining parishes in the district of West Devon; both are rural parishes, separate and distinctive, yet sharing common threads and jointly using certain amenities and facilities.

Both parishes face similar challenges - reduction in public transport, rural isolation, oversubscribed local schools and concern about potential inappropriate development. Both share a desire to have a voice in the local development that will occur in the decades ahead.

With this commonality, Bridestowe and Sourton Parish Councils, encouraged by central government, decided in 2013 to develop a joint parish plan. It was agreed that Bridestowe PC would hold the funds for the project and be the lead body in grant applications.

With the development of a new Strategic Plan by West Devon Council, which proposed allocating new housing to Bridestowe, a decision was taken to 'upgrade' to a neighbourhood development plan that, unlike a parish plan would, if successfully adopted, have statutory power and become part of the Development Plan for the Parishes.

Background data, feedback from community organisations and businesses plus local research had already been collated. With a working group in place, a constitution adopted and officers in post plus funding from Devon County Council's Town and Parish Fund, a smooth transition from parish plan to emerging neighbourhood development plan was achieved. Further engagement and consultation would be required to build on these foundations.

The two parishes of Bridestowe and Sourton were formally designated as a Neighbourhood Development Plan Area in December 2014 through an application to West Devon Borough Council under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (part 2 S6).

The Plan has been prepared by the Bridestowe and Sourton Joint Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group, whose members are parishioners and representatives from both Parish Councils.

1.3 THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN DESIGNATED AREA

In accordance with part 2 of the Regulations, West Devon District Council (WDDC) and Dartmoor National Park Authority, the two relevant local planning authorities, publicised the application from Bridestowe and Sourton Parish Council and advertised a six-week consultation period. The application was approved by WDDC in December 2015 and the parishes of Bridestowe and Sourton designated as the Neighbourhood Area (Fig 1)

1.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Bridestowe and Sourton's joint Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) has been developed from the views of local people, businesses, community organisations including young people's groups and the local schools' federation. Views have been gathered using a variety of different consultation approaches including stalls at local fetes and popular events and regular monthly evening meetings open to all.

Arising from the public meetings, a consultation group of 48 households was established. All members of this consultation group have been sent and given the opportunity to comment on and contribute to all documents prepared by the Steering Group. The households involved in the consultation group include more than 10% of the population of the two parishes.

A comprehensive paper survey was distributed to every household in the area in 2015. Regular bulletins about the emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan have been included in the monthly newsletter circulated to every household in the two parishes and current summaries have been posted at regular intervals on both village web-sites. Social media have been employed to elicit feed-back and views from younger parishioners.

In addition to the residents' consultation, a wide range of stakeholders were invited to give their views and share insights. Local businesses were asked to complete either a paper-based survey or respond online. Separate surveys were carried out to gain insight into specific areas such as recreation.

A housing needs survey, with questionnaires delivered to every household in the two parishes was commissioned in 2016 after a successful application to the National Lottery for funding. The full results of the surveys are included in Appendices I, III and IV of this report.

1.5. PROFILES OF BRIDESTOWE & SOURTON

1.5.1 Location

Bridestowe and Sourton are adjoining parishes in the district of West Devon. The A30 dual carriageway, the main access to Cornwall, runs through both parishes of the Neighbourhood Plan area, with the main Okehampton to Tavistock road (A386), running North - South, bisecting Sourton village.

The cities of Exeter and Plymouth are 30 miles to the east and 25 to the south respectively and can be reached by regular but limited bus services. The nearest mainline railway stations are in Plymouth and Exeter although plans to run trains from Okehampton to Exeter are underway. The towns of Okehampton and Tavistock are local shopping centres and offer library services, medical centres, secondary schools, community hospitals etc.

Both parishes contain Common Land in the Dartmoor National Park, parts of which are held jointly. This provides rough grazing, a small part of which is used by the military for live firing practice. The scenic quality is reflected by the 'National Park' status, which is the highest worldwide landscape designation.

The Landscape Character map (Figure 2) sets the designated area within the locality showing the mix of moorland, farmland, river valley slopes and coombes - all of which contribute to its distinctive identity. Both are rural parishes, separate and distinctive, comprised mostly of undulating farm land given over almost entirely to pasture.

Sourton Parish consists of a small village with no real nucleus, which has a public house, but no shop, together with several small hamlets. The school in the parish is in an isolated position, standing virtually alone, a good couple of miles from most of the scattered hamlets and the village itself, and predominantly serves the parish of Bratton Clovelly.

Bridestowe, in contrast has a village centre, with a shop and post office, public house and school at its heart plus a few small satellite hamlets.

The beauty of the area makes it a popular holiday destination and a place where retired people aspire to live.

1.5.2 Size and population

Bridestowe parish has a total of 2,036.16 hectares and a population of 576 (240 households), whilst Sourton parish has a larger area, 3,396.53 hectares but a smaller population, 413 (180 households). [2011Census data].

Sourton's population has been relatively static over the past 20 years, while Bridestowe's population has

increased due to recent housing developments.

The proportion of the population aged under 16 and over 65 is shown in Table 3.1, in Chapter 3 and shows a slightly lower proportion of people under 16 and a substantially higher proportion over 65 than the national average.

The two primary schools within the NDP area, are fully subscribed. Both schools have received good Ofsted reports, and attract children from outside the NDP area.

“Treetops” the thriving pre-school and after school care provider based in Bridestowe is heavily over-subscribed and is under pressure to expand as it not only serves the local area but also attracts children from the surrounding parishes.

1.5.3 Heritage

The area is steeped in history and this is reflected by the fact that there are 448 entries in the Historical Environment Record that pertains to Bridestowe and Sourton. Bronze Age remains such as hut circles and tumuli still exist on the moor. In 1991 remains of a Roman road and possible signal station were found at Sourton Down while nearby in 1643 a battle between the Royalists and Parliamentarians took place. Some farmsteads date from the Saxon period and are named in the Domesday Book. An extensive Norman earthwork can be seen among the trees of Burley Wood in Bridestowe parish. Some mostly unsuccessful mining took place in both parishes in the nineteenth century but more importantly small outcrops of limestone were quarried and the stone burned in kilns for use as an agricultural fertiliser and in the building trade. The sites are now deeply flooded and are valuable wildlife havens. An ice factory was set up on the slopes of Sourton Tor in 1875 but it was a short-lived venture, undermined in part by mild winters.

During the Second World War Bridestowe was home to three army camps and the American troops stationed at Leawood were in the forefront at the D Day landings. The concrete bases and road layout of one of these army camps are still present within the Leawood Estate lands.

1.5.4 Recreation

Sport and recreation form an important element in the life of Bridestowe and Sourton. The National Park and Fernworthy Down provide open access for walkers and horse riders whilst bridle paths, the Granite Way and Pegasus Way provide additional access for cyclists and riders. Paragliders are a regular sight, launching from Sourton Tor to share the thermals with the buzzards.

Bridestowe’s Sporting Green provides a good range of children’s play equipment but a lack of facilities for older children has been identified. Sourton has no play facilities for children.

1.5.5 Housing

Sourton village has seen little building since the Second World War apart from Trescote Way, a substantial development of bungalows built in the 1970s under previous planning regulations. Although technically within Sourton parish, Trescote Way's proximity to Bridestowe village leads residents to perceive themselves as part of that community.

Bridestowe village has had three significant residential developments in the past thirty years which have almost doubled its population. The rest of the parish inhabitants live in small hamlets or scattered farms, some of whose outbuildings have been converted to dwellings.

Several sites have been proposed in Bridestowe by landowners for possible development. All 5 proposed sites are adjacent to but outside the settlement boundary. Chapter 5 sets out the policies that relate to these and any other possible sites of development.

Initially Sourton had not been identified as a development area, but since the establishment of the local neighbourhood development planning process one application for new housing has been submitted and granted planning consent.

Sourton village had no settlement boundary at the commencement of this Neighbourhood Development Plan, but this was addressed by the Parish Council in July 2016 and a boundary drawn up and adopted. (See Appendix V)

Bridestowe and Sourton have a wide range of housing, with a relative excess of larger homes and lack of smaller homes suitable for young people and for older residents seeking to downsize but still live within the community. Redressing this imbalance in housing stock is an important feature of the policies in this Neighbourhood Development Plan, and is supported by the adopted West Devon Core Strategy (2011) and the draft Joint Local Plan prepared jointly by Plymouth, West Devon and South Hams.

Data from the 2011 Census show that Bridestowe has 240 households of which 70.4% are owner occupied (national average 63.3%), 6% social rented (national average 19.3%), and 20.4% privately rented (national average 16.8%). For Sourton there are 180 households, 81.7 % are owner occupied, 3.9% social rented and 12.2% private rented.

Average incomes in West Devon are lower than the national average, particularly for people who work in the Borough (see Chapter 3), whilst the average price of a 2-bedroomed terraced house in Okehampton is currently in the range of £140,000 – £180,000 (www.rightmove.co.uk); a starter home in a sought after rural setting is considerably more expensive. The imbalance between incomes and available low-cost housing emphasises the importance to the Parishes of measures to increase the provision of affordable housing, both to buy or rent.

1.5.6 Employment and incomes

Currently the main industries are agriculture and tourism. Most farms concentrate on fattening cattle and sheep and a few keep dairy cows. Both parishes have a caravan and camping park, public houses which serve food and have facilities for Bed and Breakfast. Bridestowe has a thriving village shop and post office. A long established residential home with separate supported living bungalows for the elderly frail, provides local employment as do a busy garage, café and hotel close to the A30.

Incomes are generally lower than the national average (see Chapter 3) and unemployment is low.

Despite the relatively low wages locally, the poor provision of public transport means that many people need to own a car to commute to work; 51% of households within the two parishes own 2 cars (national average 32%) whilst 8.3% have no access to a car (national average 25%).

Bridestowe and Sourton as part of West Devon have a low wage economy and higher living costs contribute to levels of fuel poverty locally [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2015].

1.5.7 Living in the Neighbourhood Area

In an early consultation, people were asked what they liked about living in the area; above all they valued the landscape with its proximity to Dartmoor.

Another finding was a strong sense of community and this is supported by the many clubs and societies that meet regularly, plus the social facilities offered by the village halls and the churches. Annual events like the Bridestowe Ram Roast and Sourton's Produce Show are always well attended. The area has very low levels of crime.

1.5.8 Why the Landscape is important

In WDBC's 2011 Strategic Plan the importance of the beautiful landscape of West Devon is acknowledged and it is this asset, exemplified in parishes such as Sourton and Bridestowe, that draws tourists and those wishing to retire to the area. This is also acknowledged in the emerging draft Joint Local Plan.

Key to conserving what people come here to enjoy - the scenic countryside - means not only maintaining the habitats and field systems that make up the landscape, but ensuring that development does not intrude or blight it.

Good, well designed housing, sited in areas where that development is not intrusive, can ensure that both the landscape and the built environment can happily co-exist.

Stunning views of Sourton, Bridestowe and in the far distance Bodmin Moor can be glimpsed for the first time from the A30 heading West as the road approaches the Sourton Cross. Other breathtaking views are accessed from various vantage points within the parishes and ensuring that these are in not compromised by development is of great importance in this Neighbourhood Development Plan.

1.5 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

External factors will impact on the two parishes and it is prudent to recognize that these may necessitate a review of the Neighbourhood Development Plan within the plan period.

1.6.1 Improving rail links

Improving connectivity and supporting the development of future rail freight opportunities, improving the rail link between Cornwall, Plymouth and the rest of the country is a of great importance to the Region. The Tavistock to Plymouth and Okehampton to Exeter rail links, two projects provisionally approved by the Local

Authority, will have an impact on the local area making it more attractive to commuters wishing to locate to a rural area with good rail links to the two cities. Demand for increased housing development is a likely consequence of such developments.

Currently there are significant impediments to local businesses, to the development of tourism, and to the broader economic development of West Devon caused by the absence of a rail service. The potential impacts of rail service re-opening on the local and regional economy are likely to be significant and on balance positive. (see Appendix VI).

1.6.2 Community energy projects

The move away from reliance on fossil fuels to cleaner sources of energy is a national and international priority as part of the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, to which the UK Government is a signatory.

Engaging in community energy projects that through collective action could contribute to energy generation and perhaps reduce the cost of energy for consumers, has strong support from residents (see Appendix III) and is in line with local strategic policy. There are however natural concerns that intrusive renewable installations could mar the highly-valued landscape.

1.6.3 Farming

Although agriculture directly accounts for a small percentage of local employment, its indirect involvement (e.g. equipment supply and maintenance, retail and tourism) is much greater, and its role in both parishes is historical and enduring.

Britain's exit from the European Union could impact unfavourably on the incomes of farmers and major uncertainties are currently contributing to reduced investment and limited agricultural developments. Diversification and innovative land use of traditional agriculture land may occur in the years to come but are not addressed in this plan.