



Carden Group Representations:

**East Devon Draft Local Plan (Regulation
19)**

(2020-2042)

February-March 2025

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 These representations have been prepared by Carden Group, in respect of the current consultation on the East Devon Local Plan 2042.
- 1.2 We are a strategic land company that is committed to working closely with councils to create high-quality homes that enhance local communities, prioritising thoughtful design, sustainability, and long-term value that residents can take pride in.
- 1.3 Our comments and proposed modifications on the consultation primarily relate to the following 4 draft policies:
- Strategic Policy SP02: Levels of future housing development
 - Strategic Policies SP05 and SP06 Development inside and beyond Settlement Boundaries
 - Strategic Policy WS09: Clyst Valley Regional Park
 - Strategic Policy PB05: Biodiversity Net Gain
- 1.4 Carden Group has recently secured planning permission for a major development at Treasbeare Farm, Cranbrook, comprising 1,035 homes, 25 acres of employment space, a local center, a primary school, a sports hub, SANGS, and allotments. We remain actively involved in this project and are now promoting land to the south of the approved site. Further details can be found in Section 6.

2 Strategic Policy SP02: Levels of future housing development

- 2.1 Policy SP02 states that housing provision will be made for at least 20,909 dwellings (net) within the plan area between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2042.
- 2.2 This equates to an average delivery rate of 950 homes per year, which represents 93% of the new Standard Method requirement, which was adopted by the Government in December. However, this would still result in an annual shortfall of 238 homes, leading to a significant cumulative undersupply over the plan period.
- 2.3 To ensure alignment with paragraph 16(b) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)—which requires Local Plans to be "positively prepared, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable"—we believe the Council should adopt the full Standard Method housing requirement of 1,188 homes per year. This would necessitate identifying 26,136 homes in total. Currently, paragraph 3.11 confirms that the Council has identified 22,614 homes from all sources, leaving a shortfall of 3,522 dwellings.
- 2.4 Although the 950 dpa target exceeds the 80% threshold required for Councils at an advanced stage of plan-making, Carden Group believes the Council should begin identifying additional sites immediately. This proactive approach will ensure the plan remains robust, forward-looking, and responsive to housing needs.
- 2.5 To address the 3,522-dwelling shortfall, we propose that Treasbeare Farm at Cranbrook be considered for allocation. The site is available, deliverable, and further details are provided in Section 6.
- 2.6 Adopting this approach would future-proof the Local Plan by mitigating the risk of significant housing shortfalls and reducing the likelihood of a premature review in the medium term. A proactive strategy will help the Council avoid retrospective adjustments while ensuring a stable and predictable framework for development.

Proposed Modifications

- 2.7 We propose modifying Policy SP02 to increase the annual housing target from 950 to 1,188 homes, raising the total housing target from 20,909 to 26,136 dwellings between 2020 and 2042. This adjustment ensures that the Local Plan is positively prepared, fully justified, and capable of meeting the district's long-term housing needs.

2.8 Consequently, we recommend that the Local Plan include further residential allocations to deliver the additional 3,522 dwellings required to meet the full Standard Method housing need. Suitable, available and deliverable land capable of meeting the shortfall is identified in Section 6.

3 Strategic Policies SP05 and SP06 Development inside and beyond Settlement Boundaries

- 3.1 Carden Group recognises the importance of defining settlement boundaries to ensure that development is directed to appropriate locations in alignment with the Local Plan's objectives and spatial strategy. Clearly defined boundaries provide certainty for stakeholders and help manage sustainable growth in line with strategic policies.
- 3.2 However, the Interactive Policy Map, which serves as a key tool for interpreting the Local Plan, does not currently include crucial spatial designations from the adopted Cranbrook Plan. Most notably, it omits the Built-Up Area Boundaries for Cranbrook and its designated expansion areas including Treasbeare. These boundaries are fundamental for guiding development, ensuring policy clarity, and preventing inconsistent decision-making.
- 3.3 Given that Policies SP05 and SP06 explicitly reference the Cranbrook Plan—along with numerous other policies throughout the Local Plan—it is essential to integrate these designations into the Interactive Policy Map. Their omission risks creating confusion among developers, stakeholders, and decision-makers, which could lead to inconsistent policy application and unintended consequences for future development.
- 3.4 Furthermore, Carden believe that the clarity of policy maps is a fundamental requirement for the Local Plan to be found sound. Paragraph 16(d) of the NPPF explicitly states that plans should contain policies which are *'unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision-maker should react to development proposals.'*

Proposed Modifications

- 3.5 To ensure clarity and consistency, we therefore strongly recommend that all Cranbrook Plan policy designations be made available as interactive layers on the Local Plan's Interactive Policy Map. These layers should most notably include, but not be limited to:
- The Built-Up Area Boundary for Cranbrook
 - The designated expansion areas
 - Gypsy and Traveller allocations

- Employment land allocations
- Sports Pitches
- The Cranbrook Plan area boundary

3.6 Incorporating these elements into the Interactive Policy Map will enhance usability and ensure that all relevant policy layers are easily accessible, facilitating informed decision-making.

4 Strategic Policy WS09: Clyst Valley Regional Park

4.1 We generally support the aims of Policy WS09, in respect of the Clyst Valley Regional Park (CVRP) in ensuring that development proposals within and adjacent to the CVRP will integrate Green Infrastructure and support the achievement of the objectives in the CVRP Management Plan.

Location

4.2 The boundaries of the Clyst Valley Regional Park have changed between the 2021 25-Year Masterplan and the version shown in the draft emerging Local Plan policy map.

4.3 Most notably, the updated boundaries now include additional areas to the south of Cranbrook, such as the land surrounding Treasbeare Farm. However, this area does not contain any tributaries that feed into the River Clyst, which is located over a mile to the west of the farm.

4.4 As a result, many of the newly proposed boundaries appear arbitrary and misaligned with the natural geography of the Clyst Valley, where the River Clyst and its main tributaries are situated. The policy justification provides no clear evidence to explain the rationale behind these significant boundary alterations. Without such supporting evidence, the plan fails to meet the justification requirement outlined in Paragraph 36(b) of the NPPF, which states that policies must be *'justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence'*.

4.5 Without clear evidence or rationale for these boundary changes, the policy does not meet this test and lacks the necessary justification to support its implementation.

Viability and Practical Implications on Developments

4.6 We also have serious concerns regarding the fairness and practicality of how ecological enhancements are to be delivered within this area, particularly the disproportionate burden placed on new development proposals.

4.7 The proposal requires new developments within the CVRP to implement ecological enhancements, yet much of this land remains under private ownership, primarily used for agriculture. It therefore would not be fair to impose these requirements solely on new developments whilst allowing

existing landowners to continue to operate their land without any obligation to fulfil the objectives of the CVRP.

4.8 So, again although we support ecological enhancement, placing excessive ecological obligations on new development proposals within the CRVP could risk making these projects unviable, leading to delays or cancellations.

Proposed Modifications

4.9 Carden recommends that the boundaries of the Clyst Valley Regional Park (CVRP) be revised to accurately reflect the actual geographical extent of the valley. The boundaries should be more closely aligned with the evidence base, principally in this instance the 25-Year Masterplan for the Regional Park, which was formally approved by the Council in February 2021.

4.10 Additionally, we recommend removing the terms "close" and 'adjacent' when referring to development proposals near the park, as it is overly ambiguous and lacks clear definition. The CVRP's targets should remain achievable and focused within the 2,338 hectares covered by the extent of the park at the time the 25-Year Masterplan was written.

4.11 Regarding development proposals inside the park and their ecological contributions to the park's objectives, we recommend modifying the policy wording to: "where viable" major development proposals will contribute to as many of the CVRP objectives and targets as possible. This ensures a more flexible and pragmatic approach, acknowledging site-specific viability constraints while still supporting the overall goals of the park.

5 Strategic Policy PB05: Biodiversity Net Gain

5.1 Strategic Policy PB05 mandates that major development proposals achieve at least 20% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Carden Group strongly opposes this requirement on the grounds that it deviates from national policy, raises viability concerns, and lacks a robust evidence base to justify such an increase.

National Policy Consistency and Justification

5.2 Local planning policies should align with national planning frameworks to ensure consistency and fairness in development standards. The Environment Act 2021 sets a national BNG requirement of 10%, which has been carefully assessed and legislated at a national level. Introducing a 20% threshold at the local level contradicts this policy and imposes an arbitrary uplift without clear justification.

5.3 Furthermore, there is no equivalent quantifiable evidence supporting a 20% BNG requirement. The justification, including the Lawton Report (2010) and the Nature Recovery Declaration (2023) do not specifically establish why this particular figure, and such a significant increase is necessary or appropriate in East Devon.

Viability, Land Availability, and Economic Impact

5.4 While environmental responsibility is crucial, housing developments are not the primary cause of biodiversity decline. Doubling the national Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement unfairly places an excessive burden on developers, treating them as the main contributors to biodiversity loss. This goes beyond reasonable mitigation and imposes unjustified obligations that could jeopardise the viability of essential housing and infrastructure projects.

5.5 As of March 31st, 2024, the Council's latest Housing Monitoring Update indicates that at least 2,720 homes are expected to be delivered through extant planning permissions, in addition to the 3,514 homes already completed since 2020. This brings the total to at least 6,234 homes or 28% of the Council's total anticipated 22,614-home supply over the plan period. These developments have either been exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements or were only expected to deliver the 10% threshold introduced by the Environment Act. Therefore, now imposing a significantly higher BNG obligation on future developments under the new Local Plan would create an unfair disparity.

5.6 Moreover, increasing the BNG requirement to 20% would necessitate additional land, leading to further delays in the planning and delivery process. Developers may need to acquire more land or secure off-site BNG solutions, which involve complex legal agreements, negotiations, and long-term management commitments. These delays are particularly concerning given rising housing targets under the Standard Method, as they risk slowing delivery at a time when meeting these targets is more critical than ever.

5.7 A higher BNG threshold could therefore lead to:

- Reduced housing supply due to viability and less land being available for development.
- Extended project timelines, further delaying much-needed development.
- Increased housing costs, exacerbating affordability challenges.
- A competitive disadvantage for the East Devon area, as investors and developers prioritise other council areas with policies that are aligned with national standards.

5.8 A 2020 viability report by Swale Council for example found that doubling biodiversity net gain requirements (to 20%) increased total developer costs by 19%. As a result, it is essential that BNG policies strike a balance between ecological objectives and economic realities.

Proposed Modifications

5.9 We therefore recommend that the requirement for BNG remains at 10% instead of increasing to 20%, as the higher threshold lacks clear policy justification, economic assessment, or alignment with national planning policy guidance. Moreover, given that at least 28% of housing sites since 2020 have not been required by policy to deliver 20% BNG, the increased requirement would unfairly concentrate the burden on the remaining developments in the district. This creates a disproportionate obligation for future schemes, exacerbating viability challenges and distorting the level playing field for developers. Instead of supporting sustainable growth, the higher requirement introduces unnecessary complexity, financial risk, and significant project delays, potentially jeopardising the timely delivery of much-needed housing.

6 Land at Treasbeare Farm, Cranbrook

The Site

6.1 As previously mentioned, we believe the Local Plan does not provide a sufficiently flexible supply of housing land. To meet identified housing needs in a sustainable location, we propose that our site that is situated south of the approved Treasbeare Farm development and covers approximately 60 acres (see outline below) to the south of Cranbrook should be allocated for housing.

6.2 The site consists of arable land and grassland pasture, enclosed by a network of hedgerows and trees. At its centre lies the Treasbeare Farmstead, which includes several deteriorating buildings covering approximately 4 acres of the site.



Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2022) – Site Reference GH/ED/02

6.3 In the latest HELAA, the Council rightly concluded that the site, along with the area which is now approved for housing, is suitable for both housing and employment uses.

7 Summary

7.1 Carden Group has significant reservations regarding a number of key aspects of the proposed Local Plan Review. In its current form, we believe the plan is not ready to advance to the Regulation 19 consultation stage until the following areas of concern are addressed:

Housing Numbers

7.2 The proposed housing target in Policy SP02 is inadequate to meet the area's housing needs. We strongly recommend increasing the annual housing requirement from 950 to 1,188 homes, aligning with the Standard Method calculation. This adjustment would result in a total housing need of 26,136 homes, allowing the Council to adopt a more forward-thinking approach, ultimately future-proofing the Local Plan for long-term growth and stability. Our site at Treasbeare Farm can make a meaningful contribution to this target by delivering much-needed housing in a sustainable location, helping to bridge the shortfall and support the Council's efforts to meet local demand.

Interactive Policy Map

7.3 To enhance clarity and usability, we propose that all Cranbrook Plan policy designations—including the Built-Up Area Boundaries and expansion areas—be fully integrated as interactive layers within the Local Plan's Interactive Policy Map. This will ensure that relevant policy information is readily accessible to developers, decision-makers, and all other stakeholders.

Clyst Valley Regional Park Boundaries

7.4 The boundaries of the Clyst Valley Regional Park (CVRP) should be revised to accurately reflect the true geographical extent of the valley. Aligning the boundaries with the Council-approved 25-Year Masterplan (February 2021) would provide a more coherent and effective framework for green infrastructure planning.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Requirements

7.5 We strongly advocate for a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement rather than the proposed 20%, as the higher target lacks clear policy justification, economic viability assessment, or alignment with national planning guidance. Mandating a 20% BNG would introduce excessive financial burdens,

unnecessary complexity, and potential project delays, jeopardising the delivery of much-needed housing.