

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Maria Bailey Planning has assisted South Molton Town Council to prepare and submit a designation of a neighbourhood area. Neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to prepare a plan with statutory status, a 'neighbourhood development plan', for their area. To encourage early take up of the new neighbourhood planning powers, the Department for Communities and Local Government made funding available to support a number of 'frontrunner' neighbourhood planning projects.
- 1.2 The application must comply with regulation 5 of the Neighbourhood Planning (general) Regulations 2012. The legalisation for an application for designation of a neighbourhood area states the following:
5. – (1) Where a relevant body (1) submits an area application to the local authority it must include-
- (a) a map which identifies the area to which the area application related;
 - (b) a statement explaining why this area is considered appropriate to be designated as a neighbourhood area; and
 - (c) a statement that the organisation or body making the area application is a relevant body for the purpose of section 61G of the 1990 Act.
- (2) A local planning authority may decline to consider an area application if the area relevant body has already made an area application and a decision has not yet been made on that application.



2.0 SOUTH MOLTON BRIEF HISTORY

- 2.1 South Molton is located to the south of the A361, midway between Barnstaple and Tiverton and to the south west of Exmoor National Park. The Parish is comprised of 16.5 Km² with South Molton town making of 1.4 Km² of the Parish. The town is located about 14 kilometres (9 miles) south east of Barnstaple with good access along the A361 leading towards Tiverton and the M5. It is a relatively small town with a resident population of about 4,875 (Census, 2011 in Appendix 1), but it serves an extensive, agricultural, rural area extending to include parts of Dartmoor and Exmoor. The historic core of South Molton is within a conservation area covering 17 hectares, which includes a large number of listed buildings.
- 2.2 The town is an important local service centre providing a range of retail, education, health and community facilities and employment opportunities. The town centre has a range of independent traders and an active livestock market. South Molton has expanded rapidly over recent years as an agricultural and business centre. Its population has grown substantially since 2001, with approximately 18% growth over the period 2001 to 2010, which is significantly higher than rates of population growth in other towns in North Devon (North Devon and Torridge Local Plan, 2016, para. 10.374)
- 2.3 A high proportion of South Molton's work force is involved with land based industries, although tourism is also important to the local economy. Pathfields Business Park is located to the north of the town and continues to expand as a vibrant economic centre. It has a wide range of business and distribution uses serving the surrounding rural area and reflecting its good transport links. However, average household incomes are below the average for North Devon. The Regeneration Study (2003) highlights the key constraints of the Town Centre, along with the opportunities. The document will assist in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan, by acknowledging what the centre has developed since 2003.
- 2.4 South Molton originated in early Saxon times west of the river Mole, the area being occupied from around 650 and known as Dumnania. By the time of The Domesday Book in 1086 showed it to be of some importance with 4 priests listed which was an unusually large number. The town originated around the church and in the Middle Ages a square was laid out as a new market place. South Molton has been a thriving town since the earliest days of recorded history, Gilbert de Turberville created the borough about the year 1150. There exists in the Museum two Royal Borough Charters granted by Elizabeth 1st in 1590 and Charles 2nd in 1684. These are commemorated each year with the Olde English Fayre held in June (visitsouthmolton, 2013).



- 2.5 The town's early wealth came from its importance as a centre for the wool trade, this declined in the 18th and 19th centuries and South Molton's role changed to a transport, administration and service centre. It flourished as a market town and expanded with the building of the Town Hall and Assembly rooms and the introduction of schools and many more local businesses. The church of South Molton is dedicated to St Mary Magdalene and is entered through an avenue of Lime trees. This is believed to be the third church on this site and was built during the 15th century. The tower has a peel of 8 bells that are rung regularly.
- 2.6 Tourism came with the motorcar and the trains, the latter unfortunately axed in 1966 by the infamous Dr Beeching when the line between Barnstaple and Taunton was closed. Tourism plays a very important part in the economy of South Molton and the surrounding area being situated in an ideal central position within easy reach of Exmoor, Dartmoor, the rugged north coast and the beautiful sandy beaches to the west (visitsouthmolton, 2013).
- 2.7 The town still flourishes as a market town with its square still surrounded by small local shops, unspoilt and much the same as it has been for years. The main market day is Thursdays with an extra pannier market on Saturdays.
- 2.8 South Molton is a well-built market town trading mostly in sheep and cattle. The livestock market is fundamental to the role of South Molton as an agricultural centre serving a large rural hinterland. The existing livestock market is expected to relocate from its current town centre location during the Plan period to a more suitable site. (Emerging North Devon and Torridge Local Plan, 2016).
- 2.9 South Molton had a railway station on the Devon Railway until 1966, when the branch line was finally closed. The station was described in detail in the bestselling railway publication the Country Railway. It is situated on the southern side of Exmoor just off the North Devon link road, which in part follows the route of the railway line.
- 2.10 The brief history demonstrates the wealth of history the town and surrounding area has encountered for a significant period of time.



3.0 SOUTH MOLTON PARISH FUTURE

- 3.1 The now submitted North Devon and Torridge Local Plan highlights the town will be expanding through sustainable employment-led growth through a combination of new housing, business development and community facilities to strengthen the town's role as an important local service centre that is able to meet its own needs and those of the surrounding rural area. The aspiration will be for South Molton to develop as a vibrant centre for jobs, shops, recreation, community and service facilities to support the needs of the town and communities in the surrounding rural area. The expansion and enhancement of the town centre will strengthen South Molton's vitality and viability as an important local service centre, delivering retail opportunities to meet the needs of the town and its rural catchment area by reducing retail expenditure leakage to other centres. Town centre expansion will also help to deliver enhanced community facilities and services to address the social and economic needs of the town's existing and future residents.
- 3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan would enrich the forthcoming Local Plan's "*Spatial Vision and Development Strategy to 2031*", particularly "*Policy SMO: South Molton Spatial Vision and Development Strategy*". It is articulated in the Plan as follows:

"The Spatial Vision

Housing and employment growth at South Molton will promote greater self-sufficiency with increased support and improved access to community facilities for the town and its large rural catchment area. New development will be focused on the western side of town to deliver a mix of high quality sustainable family and affordable housing, employment, key community infrastructure and a new distributor road to reduce traffic congestion in the town centre.

Expansion to Pathfields Business Park will support a diverse range of employment opportunities to capitalise on its proximity to the strategic road network. Relocation of the livestock market to the north of the town together with new associated industries will further develop the town as an agricultural business centre to serve North Devon. Community driven regeneration of the central car park area will facilitate expansion of the town centre to strengthen its retail provision and deliver tourism opportunities and key community infrastructure through high quality design that will capitalise on the town's built and cultural heritage.

South Molton will become a more vibrant, healthy, prosperous, accessible town providing for the needs of all including provision of a new 'sports hub' linked to the community college, an enhanced network of public footpaths, cycle routes and



bridleways, extension of the community woodland, superfast broadband and business support. Increased partnership working will deliver key services and facilities including through the community and voluntary sectors. The community will be empowered to make the most of its talents and leadership to deliver the vision.”

The Spatial Development Strategy

Over the period to 2031, the Local Plan will enable growth of high quality development supported by necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of South Molton. The spatial vision for South Molton will be delivered through:

- (a) provision of approximately 1,208 dwellings, including affordable and extra care homes, to meet the range of the communities' housing needs, with associated development and infrastructure on a continuous basis during the plan period between 2011 and 2031;;*
- (b) provision of new site allocations of approximately 900 dwellings and non--allocated developable sites of approximately 194 dwellings;;*
- (c) an urban extension to the west of South Molton to accommodate about 840 new dwellings supported by required physical, social and green infrastructure;;*
- (d) provision of approximately 17.5 hectares of additional employment land to the east and west of Hacche Lane at Pathfields Business Park to strengthen the town's role as a vibrant business and employment centre;;*
- (e) expansion and enhancement of the town centre to strengthen the town's vitality and viability and reduce leakage of spend to other centres;;*
- (f) social and community facilities required to support new development including provision of a new primary school, expansion of the existing infants to a primary school, new medical centre, new sewage treatment works, additional sports pitches, allotments and informal open space;;*
- (g) a new sports hub to the south of the Community College;;*
- (h) provision of a new distributor road through the strategic western extension securing enhancement of the town's transport infrastructure to reduce town centre congestion and optimising accessibility to jobs, shops and community facilities within and around the town;;*
- (i) provision of additional footpaths, cyclepaths and bridleway routes around the town towards providing an orbital route within an enhanced green infrastructure network;;*
- (j) improvements to highway safety for existing junctions on the A361;;*
- (k) support for initiatives to improve and mitigate against any harm to water quality in the rivers and streams;; and*
- (l) encouragement of development that incorporates sustainable construction standards and techniques.”*



- 3.3 South Molton is also a key representative in Policy ST08 Scale and Distribution of New Development in Northern Devon. The policy identifies projection of the housing supply (dwellings) between 2011- 2031 to be 1,208 (Appendix 1), increasing the housing stock by approximately 50% from the number of the 2011 Census Data (Appendix 2). This housing stock figure also contributes to 16, 469 of the total planned provision over northern Devon. The development of the Neighbourhood Plan would provide the community with local empowerment with regard to the details of these allocations. The 2012 Northern Devon Strategic Housing Market Assessment provides the required housing evidence for North Devon and Torridge.
- 3.4 Furthermore, Policy ST08 identifies employment land supply 2011-2031 for South Molton has been allocated 17.5 hectares from 110 hectares total distributed in the forthcoming Local Plan. This is a considerable contribution from South Molton, mainly due to its close proximity to the M5 that provides good accessibility to the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition, good accessibility and Exmoor National Park approximately four miles way encourages sufficient tourism to the area.
- 3.5 Moreover, the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan acknowledges the importance of the community surrounding South Molton Town, particularly in terms of them utilising the Town facilities, amenities and employment. Consequently, the conclusion was drawn to designate the boundary of the civil parish instead of the town boundary illustrated in the Local Plan.

4.0 SOUTH MOLTON BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

4.1 The application includes a single parish council of South Molton. The boundary is the administrative area of South Molton Civil Parish within the local authority of North Devon Council (please refer to the attached Map).

4.2 The Planning Government Guidance states the following could be considerations when deciding the boundaries of a neighbourhood area:

- village or settlement boundaries, which could reflect areas of planned expansion
- the catchment area for walking to local services such as shops, primary schools, doctors' surgery, parks or other facilities
- the area where formal or informal networks of community based groups operate
- the physical appearance or characteristics of the neighbourhood, for example buildings may be of a consistent scale or style
- whether the area forms all or part of a coherent estate either for businesses or residents
- whether the area is wholly or predominantly a business area
- whether infrastructure or physical features define a natural boundary, for example a major road or railway line or waterway
- the natural setting or features in an area
- size of the population (living and working) in the area

Electoral ward boundaries can be a useful starting point for discussions on the appropriate size of a neighbourhood area; these have an average population of about 5,500 residents.

4.3 The town was one of the boroughs reformed by the Municipal Reform Act 1835. It retained this status as a municipal borough until 1967, when it became a rural borough in the South Molton Rural District. The proposal of South Molton Civil Parish as a Neighbourhood Plan fulfils the above considerations for the boundary. As previously mentioned this is a mature, well-established boundary which suits the nature of the Neighbourhood Plan. Furthermore, having considered the current adopted and newly submitted Local Plans of North Devon Authority, the Parish Council feels it would be appropriate, through the Neighbourhood Plan, to prepare a local planning policy that can better address the needs and wishes of the local community and provide a degree of local distinctiveness to the way planning decisions are taken, giving priority to local people in the Parish.

4.4 Despite its widespread population in the rural periphery, the inhabitants of the Parish maintain close ties to South Molton Town Centre and, as a whole, share the same aspirations for the future of the Parish and it is thus appropriate that the whole parish boundary be defined as a Neighbourhood Plan Area.



5.0 SOUTH MOLTON RELEVANT BODY

- 5.1 South Molton Town Council proposes the Neighbourhood Plan designation of South Molton Parish. Maria Bailey Planning Ltd will guide the process to ensure the proposal fulfils the legislative requirement of the Act and North Devon Local Plan aspirations, policy and targets. Due to the simplicity of the single boundary parish, South Molton Town Council will be solely the 'relevant body'.
- 5.2 There was a meeting on the 8th of September 2016 where the Town Council were united that the parish of South Molton would be most appropriate for the area designation. Due to the nature of the historic market town the individuals who use South Molton are not limited to the Town itself but the surrounding rural area.
- 5.3 There was a publicly advertised event on 22nd October from 10am -12pm in the Town Hall where local people were invited to come and learn about Neighbourhood Planning and be part of the steering group. The event was to promote openness and involvement with the local people. The attendance was good with positive feedback. There were no negative comments about the area designation, with some individuals keen to sign up for the steering group. However, some individuals could not attend, and therefore Maria Bailey Planning circulated forms to the contact database that included local businesses, councilors and community organisations to provide them another opportunity to sign up.
- 5.4 Currently 21 individuals signed up to the neighbourhood steering group, including residents, business owners, elected representatives and individuals from voluntary organisations. It is important to include a variety of individuals and groups to the steering group to make a fair representation of the South Molton community. It is important to give opportunity to steering groups or wider working groups in South Molton, such as newer residents, children, businesses, service providers, national and local builders, non-profit housing groups, people on waiting list, the homeless, self-builders and retailers.



6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The South Molton Town Council propose to area designate South Molton Civil Parish for the establishment of a Neighbourhood Plan. This will benefit both South Molton Town and surrounding rural area. The forthcoming new Local Plan illustrates the Authority's future aspiration of South Molton. With some of the intentions quite considerable, it would be beneficial for the community to have an opportunity to contribute to change within their parish.
- 6.2 We kindly request the LPA to agree to the area designation for the South Molton Neighbourhood Plan proposal.

7.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Housing Commitments and Additional Land Release Requirements

	Built 2011 - 2013	Commitments ⁽¹⁾	Non Strategic Sites ⁽²⁾	Allocations ⁽³⁾	Total Supply
South Molton	19	95	194	900	1,208

Appendix 2 – South Molton Ward Census 2011

Variable	Measure	South Molton	North Devon (Non-Metropolitan District)	South West	England
2011 Population: All Usual Residents (Persons, Mar11) ¹	Count	4,875	93,667	5,288,935	53,012,456
2011 Population: Males (Persons, Mar11) ¹	Count	2,327	45,558	2,590,608	26,069,148
2011 Population: Females (Persons, Mar11) ¹	Count	2,548	48,109	2,698,327	26,943,308
2011 Density (number of persons per hectare) (Persons, Mar11) ¹	Rate	3.0	0.9	2.2	4.1
All Households (Households, Mar11) ¹	Count	2,171	40,001	2,264,641	22,063,368
All households who owned their accommodation outright (Households, Mar11) ^{1, 2}	%	36.3	39.1	35.4	30.6
All households who owned their accommodation with a mortgage or loan (Households, Mar11) ^{1, 2}	%	26.6	29.4	32.0	32.8
Very Good Health (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	42.9	46.4	46.9	47.2
Good Health (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	35.3	33.8	34.6	34.2
Day-to-Day Activities Limited a Lot (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	9.8	8.7	8.3	8.3
Economically Active; Employee; Full-Time (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	36.7	33.3	37.4	38.6
Economically Active; Employee; Part-Time (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	16.8	16.4	15.1	13.7
Economically Active; Self-Employed (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	12.5	14.6	11.2	9.8
Economically Active; Unemployed (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	2.9	3.0	3.3	4.4
People aged 16 and over with 5 or more GCSEs grade A-C, or equivalent (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	17.1	17.2	16.4	15.2
People aged 16 and over with no formal qualifications (Persons, Mar11) ¹	%	26.9	24.1	20.7	22.5

Source: Office for National Statistics



