

Sustainable Community Strategy for Devon

Devon: The Place and its People

*Queen of counties
Home of sea dogs
Winding lanes with primrosed banks
Tree lined rivers
Red earth accents
For glorious Devon - I give thanks*

By Nest Harris, winner of the 24Devon poetry competition

Draft for consultation

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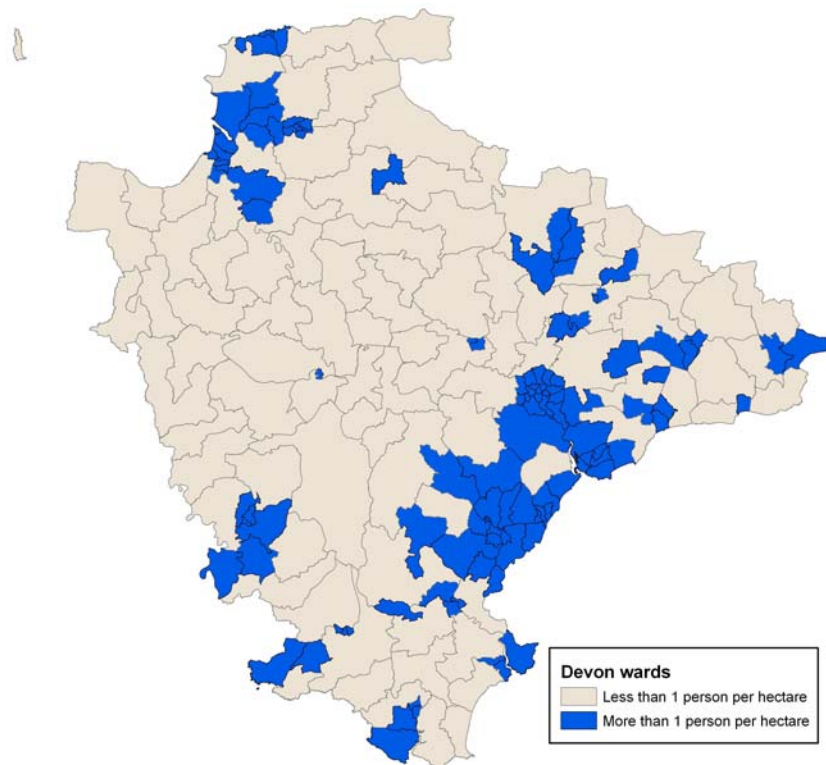
Context

The evidence based which has been produced to support the Sustainable Community Strategy has been developed through looking at the issues facing Devon and structured around a number of themes such as economy, housing, health etc. This paper looks at Devon in terms of place and population and provides a broad overview of how Devon works and the spatial drivers that need to be considered.

Communities and Place

Devon is the third largest county in the country but one of the most sparsely populated. Its physical geography has shaped the way it has developed, with its position on the South West peninsula encouraging the growth of major transport links on the eastern side of the county. The granite mass of Dartmoor covers some 11% of the area, limiting settlement. Another important geographic influence on settlement is the coastline on two sides of the county; this has led to development of coastal settlements, both ports and resorts. The topography points routes towards Exeter which has been the dominant settlement in Devon since Saxon times.

Population Density 2006



Source: South Devon Informatics Service (FHSA 2006)

While nearly 16% of the population of 731,000 live in the city of Exeter, most people in Devon live in or within reach of small market towns. Devon has 422 parishes, of which 97% have a population of less than 10,000; and 93% have a population of less than 4,000. Rurality is a defining feature of Devon, with repercussions on the quality of life, access to jobs, homes, services and facilities, and the economy.

Devon's Towns and Rural Areas

A distinctive feature of Devon is the large number of market and coastal towns spread across the county. Across Devon the relationship between towns, villages and the surrounding countryside is complex. Devon's towns provide a wide range of facilities and services for people and communities in the surrounding hinterland, including employment, education and training, shopping and leisure facilities. They are vital to the well being of surrounding communities, as they offer a variety of services to their hinterland. However, modern transport has enabled many people to choose where they live, work and shop, with many rural residents commuting to nearby urban centres for work, leisure and shopping. In some areas this has led to a concentration of employment opportunities and services in larger urban areas, with some market towns struggling to retain services and prosper economically.

Many of the issues identified in this evidence base are exacerbated in rural areas; the Devon Rural Network (www.drn.org.uk) has identified accessibility, rural business and productivity, environment and climate change and community self confidence as key issues facing Devon. But there is much to celebrate in the rural areas too. Many communities have prepared town or village plans; partnerships are actively working together to pursue projects for their communities; our two World Heritage Sites and other valuable countryside and coastal assets support the tourism industry; farming is adapting, diversifying and changing in response to changing agricultural policy; efforts are being made to address the need for more affordable housing and partners are supporting local effort with funding.

Most of the job growth in the future is expected to be in the main urban areas of Exeter, Barnstaple and Newton Abbot. Plymouth and Torbay also exert an influence across Devon, in terms of job, housing and retail markets.

This presents the challenge of recognising growth within urban areas, while extending these benefits into surrounding areas and the rural hinterland, and responding to the needs of Devon's towns and rural areas.

Growth

Devon attracts nearly eight million visitors per year and the resident population is growing at over twice the national average with an increase of around 5,000 each year. The [Regional Spatial Strategy](#) predicts growth in the major urban areas – particularly Barnstaple, Newton Abbot and Exeter.

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy proposes:

- Between 2006 and 2026 almost 3,400 new homes to be built annually in Devon
- The scale of change and focus of development will be greatest in Exeter, Barnstaple and Newton Abbot
- Two new communities in South Hams and East Devon to help meet the scale of housing need associated with Plymouth and Exeter
- Transport and infrastructure frameworks to support change
- More limited change to support the localised role and function of market towns
- Limited development, at a reduced rate than in the past, in smaller towns and villages to meet community need
- Measures to protect the environment, reduce resource consumption and promote renewable energy technologies
- Better quality development and timely delivery of the necessary social and community facilities to support it.

[Don't know if the next bit about the different areas should be in here – can't decide!](#)

Northern Devon

The high quality environment of northern Devon is widely acknowledged and much of the area is covered by UNESCO Biosphere designation. The economic, cultural and commercial influence of Barnstaple extends over a wide area of northern Devon. Although the Barnstaple and Bideford have accommodated significant housing growth over recent years Barnstaple continues to be a key employment centre and has experienced improved economic performance. However it has relied on a narrow base of growth sectors including manufacturing, distribution and real estate activity. Unemployment is relatively high, and several settlements qualify for funding initiatives to support regeneration and community activity. Plans in the Regional Spatial Strategy include the provision of additional housing - much of this to be located in Barnstaple - alongside regeneration of specific rural areas such as parts of Torridge, and plans to stimulate the economy and develop the skills base.

Newton Abbot

Newton Abbot is the focal point for future development and change within Teignbridge District. Although the town has a relatively balanced employment and workforce profile there are significant commuting flows to both Torbay and Exeter. Plans include providing additional housing, measures to improve economic performance and provide a better balance between jobs and homes, improve social and community infrastructure, and improve the transport infrastructure.

Devon's Cities

Exeter

Exeter has been identified as a major hub for future investment and development and the provision of specialist services to serve its hinterland, complementing local aspirations which see Exeter as a regional "capital". This reflects the city's status as a major economic and commercial centre and its role in providing health, cultural, leisure and retailing facilities across much of Devon. The city is economically buoyant and job growth in the sub region has exceeded national and regional rates. The city and the sub region have a high environmental quality with many assets of international importance. This prosperity hides pockets of deprivation. Across the sub region low earnings are also an issue, making the affordability of housing an issue.

Measures planned aim to realise the full economic potential of the city, address the current imbalance between homes and jobs, and to minimise the impact of transport on the environment, alongside the social and community facilities that support quality of life. It will be vital to encourage a better balance between population distribution and employment, and promote the retention of services and facilities in the main towns and settlements outside of Exeter.

Plymouth

Plymouth is the economic engine of the south west of Devon, with a catchment area that extends into West Devon and South Hams. Significant growth and change is expected in the city with measures to boost the economy and population, impacting on parts of Devon close to the urban area. This development will include a new community to the east of the city, with improved transport infrastructure, and the development of employment land.

Torbay

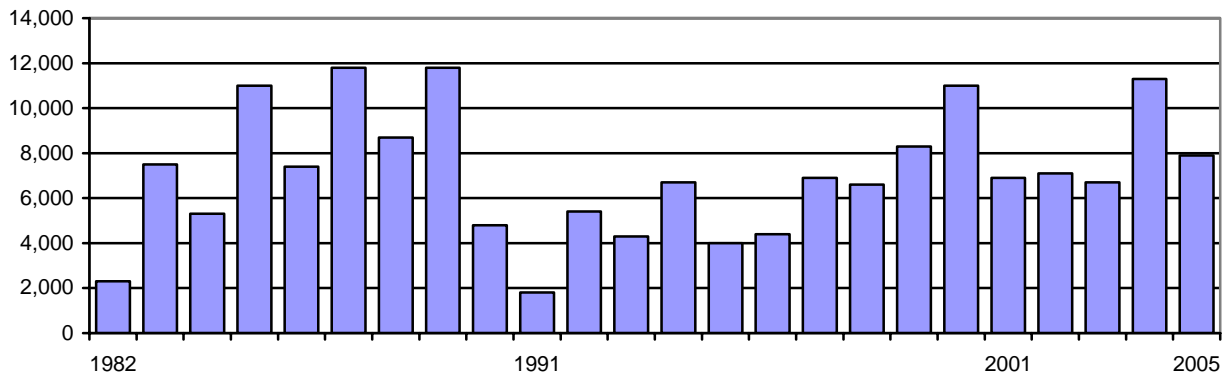
In recent years the city has struggled to prosper economically and there is a need for economic diversification and regeneration in specific areas. Nevertheless, the urban area has good health, education and shopping facilities, and is an important holiday and conference destination. Complex journey to work and housing market patterns exist because of the town's proximity to the more economically successful city of Exeter. The rate of recent population growth in Teignbridge, with good accessibility to both urban areas, reflects this. The strategy for Torbay anticipates its need for future development being accommodated within its own administrative boundaries. Proposals concentrate on stimulating the economy, investment in the physical fabric of the town and provision of key infrastructure, including the South Devon link.

A changing place – population and demographics

Devon is a changing place, with an increasing population and changing demographic profile. The population is growing at over twice the national average, as outlined above, and becoming more diverse. Although

satisfaction with Devon as a place to live is generally very high, not everyone in Devon has the same opportunity to enjoy a good quality of life. More than 52,000 people live in areas classed as among the 25% most disadvantaged in the country. There is also a significant problem of poverty and disadvantage in many of Devon’s rural communities, which is often overlooked by national statistics.

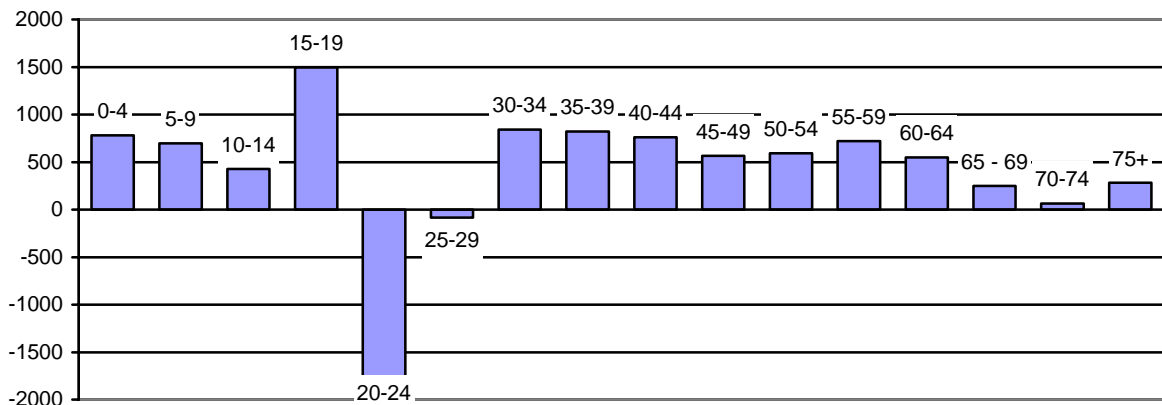
Net Migration



Source: Office of National Statistics

Significant demographic change is taking place in the county. Whilst the population of Devon as a whole has been increasing, the number of young people aged 20 to 24 has reduced over the last 20 years. A declining birth rate will result in a fall of 2.5% in those aged under 20 over the next 5 years.

Gain of population age – December 04/05

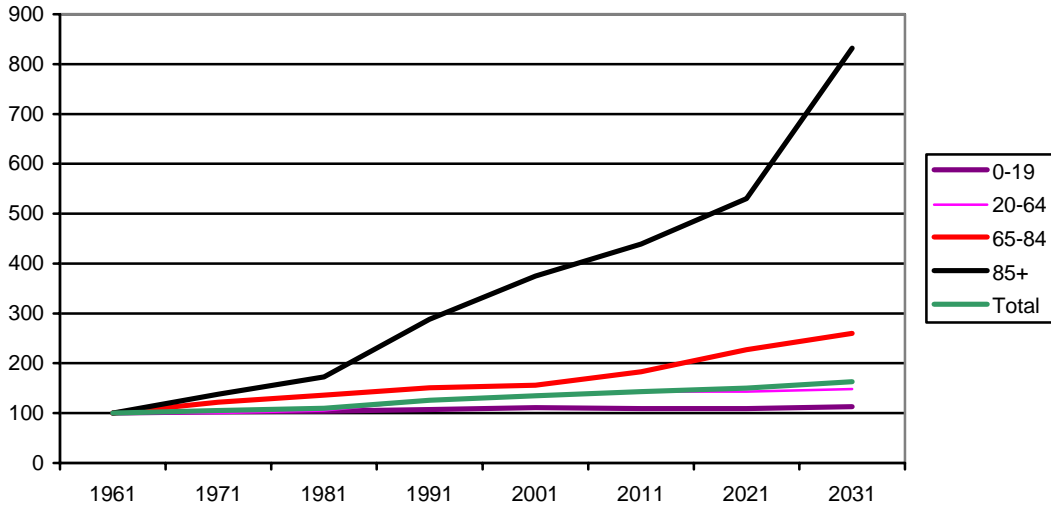


Source: Office of National Statistics

The county remains a popular retirement destination and 42% of the population are aged 50+ compared with the national average of 34%. The population of people aged 50+ continues to rise and up to a 40% increase in the 85+ population is predicted over the next 20 years. This changing age

profile within the county may result in changing requirements and additional pressures on public services over the coming years.

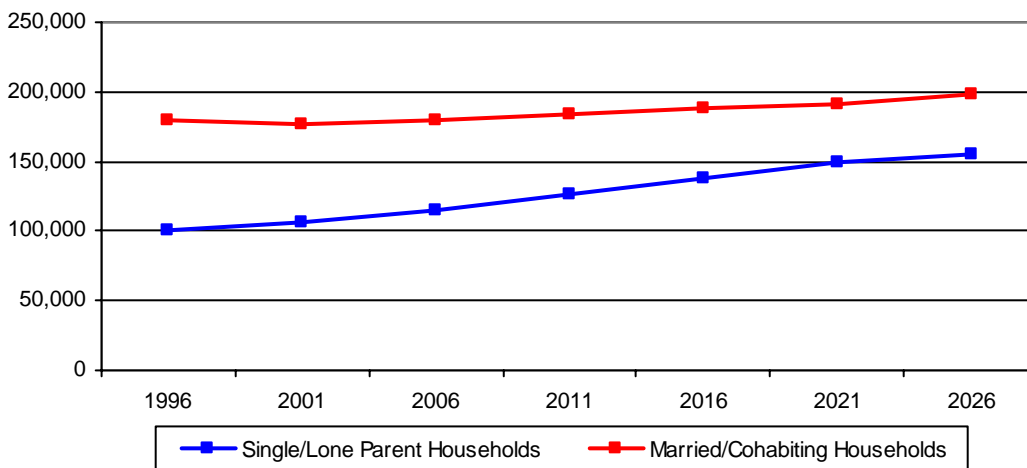
Change in Age Structure



Source: Census Crown Copyright and Devon County Council – Corporate Information Services

Devon is becoming more diverse – the black and minority ethnic population doubled between 1991 and 2001 and accounted for 1.13% of the total population, and there is an increasing migrant worker population which presents both opportunities and challenges for adapting public services. Similarly, changing lifestyles are predicted over coming years – which may result in different pressures on public services.

Projection of changing lifestyles in Devon County Council



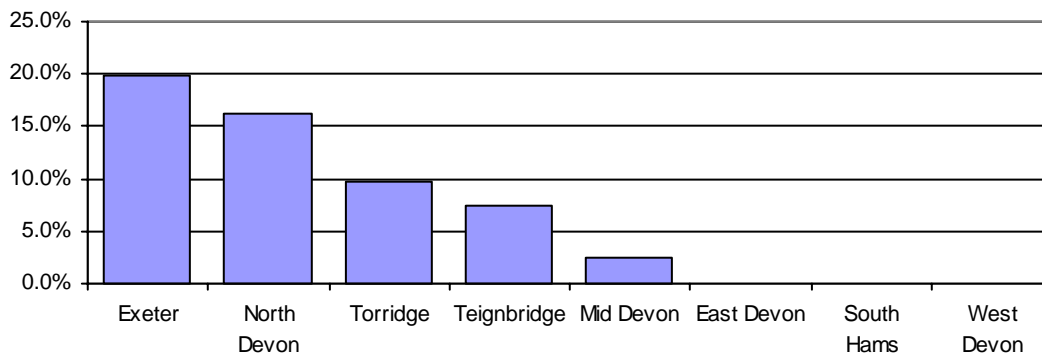
Source: Corporate Information Services, Devon County Council

Devon's popularity as a place to live has contributed to a very sharp increase in house prices in recent years – there was a 131% increase in average prices between 1999 and 2004 compared to 84% for England as a whole. Shortage of affordable housing is a significant issue with average house prices nearly 10 times average earnings in Devon.

Tourism, agriculture, food and drink, marine and environmental technologies and the creative industries make an important contribution to the Devon economy. While employment levels are high but many jobs are low paid, part-time and seasonal with average full time earnings roughly 14% below the national average. The most recent productivity figure measured by Gross Value Added for the county as a whole is only 78% of the national average, although Exeter performs much better with GVA at 121% of the national average.

Academic performance and skills levels among the working population are equal to or surpass the national average but there is wide variation across the county and some parts of the county are well below national levels. There is also a significant problem of poverty and disadvantage in many of Devon's rural communities which is overlooked by national statistics and funding allocations because of its dispersed nature. For Devon's children and young people a difficult and disadvantaged upbringing often leads to further disadvantage in adult life with only 57.5% of care leavers in employment, education or training compared with 93% of all young people.

Index of Deprivation 2004



Source: Index of Deprivation 2004, 2001 Census.

A changing place – environment and climate

Protecting Our Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment

The quality of Devon's environment motivates the majority of visitors to spend their holidays in the county, and Devon attracts nearly eight million visitors per year. Factors such as the landscape, open space, countryside, townscape, historic and cultural character are fundamental to the distinctiveness of Devon, but are under threat from the development required to meet the physical needs of the community, degradation, poor land management and mineral extraction and waste disposal.

Work with the development process to protect and enhance the factors that make Devon special will be beneficial.

Addressing Climate Change

Climate change, principally due to the emission of greenhouse gases from human activity is already affecting Devon and the scenarios suggest a range of impacts on the coastline, infrastructure, coastal towns and the landscape and biodiversity of the county. The county emits an estimated 8.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, broadly divided equally between domestic, commercial/industrial and road transport sources. Transport is one area where a spatial approach can have an effect by addressing the need to travel, particularly by car. Other areas that could have a beneficial effect are the reduction of emissions from homes and the promotion of sustainable and energy efficient construction. Devon needs to consider how it can contribute to the continuing demand for energy, by support for renewable technologies, balancing this against the need to protect the landscape and countryside.

Sustainable Consumption and Production

Successful economic performance can bring benefits in terms of prosperity, job choice and investment. However, if economic growth is not managed properly the knock on effects could be degradation of the environment, more congestion and pollution. A successful, low carbon economy that recognises the importance of Devon's environment as an economic driver will help Devon retain its special landscape.