Our Heritage & Our Environment

Welcome to the latest addition of Our Plan e-Newsletter. This newsletter looks at the issues and challenges for Our Heritage and Our Environment, and how we think these areas could be addressed by planning policies in Our Plan. But we want to know what you think.
Our Heritage

We know that the historic environment of the South Hams is part of our national heritage. This non-renewable, outstanding and distinctive resource plays a vital part in what we define as the local character of our District.

We also think the historic environment is really important in helping us define our local identity and culture and that it is part of how we feel about where we live. You have already told us that you wish to see a positive strategy for the conservation and enhancement of our historic environment and for us to help promote local heritage.

By historic environment we don’t just mean those areas, buildings and features with statutory protection but also features that are valued locally and the wider landscape and townscape. Together these make up our historic environment and are what we call our heritage assets, provide some important and valued local views and the urban and landscape setting for future change.

We also have a responsibility to protect heritage assets under threat or at risk from neglect or decay, to consider the impact of new development and other issues such as traffic, noise and air quality on our historic environment and on the setting of heritage assets and look at how we can ensure the quality of our landscapes and townscares is respected.

We need to support proposals and opportunities which help secure the long term viability of our heritage assets and their role in the community while ensuring development schemes respect their integrity and enhance, conserve and protect them.
The setting for our future development

The natural and historic environment is the setting for our future growth. This is nothing new – our environment has shaped communities, economic activity and development for generations. It is fundamental to sustainable growth, our local economy and the future of our communities.

The historic environment plays a vital part in place making providing character, distinctiveness and a sense of place and it is important we care for and enhance it. It helps local people to be proud of where they live and it attracts people from other areas to visit. This in turn supports local tourism, and other economic activity.

Responsibilities for the Historic Environment

Different people have different interests and responsibilities for the historic environment. For example, national organisations like English Heritage have certain responsibilities for listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments. The National Trust is well known but there are also smaller groups and local communities that take an active interest in our historic environment. We think everyone has a responsibility to look after our historic environment for future generations.

Did you know?

In South Hams there are:

- **47** Conservation Areas
- **Over 2,900** Listed Buildings
- **Over 400** Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- **8** Historic Parks & Gardens
- **Many** non-designated heritage assets

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Understanding our historic environment and doing something locally

We think it is important for people to understand the historic environment. This helps us value our local environment, seek high quality new development and support resilient healthy communities.

Locally, we have designated quite a number of Conservation Areas, some community’s have undertaken village appraisals and Neighbourhood Plans may include policies about the historic environment.

Our Plan Policy for the Historic Environment

This needs to reflect national policy and guidance about the historic environment and the setting of heritage assets and take account of local views about the historic environment.

We think ... Our history matters and we hope you will give us your views about how you think we should shape policies about our historic environment in Our Plan.

What will Our Plan do?

We are suggesting a comprehensive policy which will aim to:

- Promote a positive strategy to conserve, enjoy and enhance the historic environment
- Recognise the contribution it makes to our area being outstanding and locally distinctive
- Consider the significance, character, setting and local distinctiveness of heritage assets and will seek to enhance these where possible
- Conserve and enhance Conservation Areas and support management plans for these areas where they are in place
- Recognise a broad definition of the historic environment which includes both designated and non designated heritage assets
- Promote the economic role of the historic environment and its contribution to the well being of our communities
- Recognise the role the historic environment plays in how people feel about their area, their cultural heritage and identity as well as in place making and shaping future development
- Encourage the interpretation and understanding of the historic environment it plays and the role it plays
Our Design

Our Plan will include a policy about securing high quality design to help ensure development responds positively to our towns, villages and countryside.

Please tell us what you think should be considered to help us secure high quality design in South Hams.

What will Our Plan do?

We are suggesting it will include a policy on securing high quality design so new development:

- Reflects the distinctive character of the local area and the site, including the natural and historic environment
- Creates places that are attractive, accessible, functional, inclusive and well connected, with appropriate public spaces and good local public transport
- Encourage innovative and respectful design

Our Environment

Our Landscape, the AONB and Dartmoor

The District is renowned for the high quality beauty of its natural environment.

South Hams is characterised by a rugged coastline, sandy beaches, river valleys, patchwork countryside, rolling uplands, moorland fringe and historic villages and market towns. The planning area is bordered by Dartmoor National Park to the north and contains two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the South Devon AONB and Tamar Valley AONB. Such an attractive landscape plays an important role in the local economy and quality of life for its community and the visitors that are attracted to our area.

Did you know?

44% of South Hams planning area is in the South Devon AONB
2% is in the Tamar Valley AONB
19% of the District lies in the Dartmoor National Park. Although the National Park area has its own planning authority it is important that we consider the impact any decisions we make have on the National Park, which itself is a significant part of our heritage and landscape.

Being a rural area with only a few historic market towns there is significant pressure from development in the countryside (and coastal areas). Therefore, careful management is required to conserve and enhance the South Hams landscape character, and keep what is special about our local area.

**What will Our Plan do?**

We are suggesting it will:

- Recognise and promote what makes the area ‘special’ and use the AONB Management Plan to inform ‘Our Plan’
- Include a policy on nationally important landscapes (i.e. the AONB and Dartmoor National Park). This will give great weight to the protection and enhancement of the special qualities of the AONB and Dartmoor, but recognise they are living landscapes and some development is needed to meet housing needs and assist the social and economic wellbeing of these areas
- Include a policy on conserving and enhancing landscape character across the whole area, inside and outside the AONB
- Make sure the impact on landscape, particularly visual impact, is assessed carefully and robustly on relevant applications.
Our Coast

The South Hams coast is renowned for being scenically beautiful. The coastline is nationally important and the majority is designated as Heritage Coast. The coast is an important asset in terms of its character, biodiversity, employment, recreation and tourism opportunities, as well as for our rural communities. It is a finite resource and as such needs to be preserved.

Did you know?

The South Hams coastline stretches for 88km and includes some of the most unspoilt coastline on the south coast.

What will Our Plan do?

We are suggesting it will:

• Include a policy that will ensure the undeveloped coast is protected and enhanced. The policy will also look to improve public enjoyment and access to the coast wherever possible.

• Use the Heritage Coast as the basis for defining the undeveloped coast.

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Coastal Change Management Areas

Our coastline is susceptible to erosion and change. This was seen recently with the winter storms of 2014, with significant damage across the South West, including South Hams coastline and beaches.

What will Our Plan do?
We are suggesting it will:

- Include a policy that will protect our coast against inappropriate development in vulnerable areas
- Define a Coastal Change Management Area using vulnerable areas identified in the South Devon and Dorset Shoreline Management Plan.

Our Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of plant and animal life in a particular place. The high quality environment in South Hams also has the benefit of many biodiversity designations of international, national and local significance. The protection and enhancement of species and habitats is essential in designated areas and other areas in our countryside, towns and villages. Protecting our biodiversity is important for our area’s attraction, sense of place and the local character of our landscape, economy, tourism and overall environmental quality.

Did you know?

In South Hams there are:

- 6 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- 1 Special Protection Area (SPA)
- 23 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- 2 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)
- 2 National Nature Reserves (NNR)
- 262 County Wildlife Sites (CWS)
- 1 Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

The South Hams is home to the nationally rare Greater Horseshoe Bat and Cirl Bunting.

What will Our Plan do?
We are suggesting it will:

- Include a policy that conserves and enhances biodiversity (designated sites, and other areas and species) and creates new habitats wherever possible.
Our Green and Blue Infrastructure

Green and Blue Infrastructure are the terms used to describe the networks of natural features and places which provide a high quality environment that enriches our quality of life. Green and Blue Infrastructure in the South Hams include:

- Network of greenspace, parks, gardens and allotments
- Sports and play facilities
- Beaches, estuaries and coastal waters
- National Cycle Network routes
- South West Coast Path, Regional Walking Trails, Public Rights of Way and Permissive Paths
- Large areas of accessible land within Dartmoor National Park

What will Our Plan do?
We are suggesting it will:

- Include a policy on Green and Blue Infrastructure that will create new facilities and protect existing ones.

Our Water – Flood Risk

We are experiencing extreme weather events and this brings a greater chance of flooding and damage to properties. The Council works in partnership with the Environment Agency who manage the risk of flooding rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and sea. It also works with Devon County Council who manages the risk from surface water, groundwater and smaller rivers and leads on community recovery.

An assessment is being produced that assesses flood risk across the district. It will consider where development should and shouldn’t go.

Did you know?

Critical Drainage Areas (places prone to significant surface water flooding) have been defined by the Environment Agency in Ivybridge, Kingsbridge, Modbury and Totnes.

What will Our Plan do?
We are suggesting it will:

- Include a policy that avoids inappropriate development in areas at greatest risk of flooding and does not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Two government tests will be used to ensure this takes place (the sequential and exception tests) and details of these are available from the Planning Guidance website
- Support joint working with the Environment Agency on planning applications to encourage community resilience to flooding events, by using building design, green infrastructure or sustainable drainage and other measures
- Ensure drainage solutions form part of the design process.
Our Water Quality

Development can have a negative impact on water quality, such as on biodiversity, river shell fisheries, levels of phosphorous and nitrates and bathing waters. The Environment Agency monitors water quality of bathing waters and rivers.

What will Our Plan do?

We are suggesting it will:

- Include a policy that will prevent deterioration and improve water quality where possible

Our Plan will also be accompanied by three different environmental assessments that are required by law. They are:

- **Sustainability Appraisal** – will test the sustainability of the plan and policies using an assessment framework
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment** – will test the likely impact the plan will have on European protected sites
- **Habitat Regulations Assessment** – will test the likely impact the plan will have on protected European sites and species

We will publish these assessments on our website.

Please tell us what you think

Do you think we have covered the key issues?
Please send us your comments on the environment and heritage parts of Our Plan by **5th January 2015**

For more information

Follow us on Twitter and find us on Facebook to keep up to date with progress being made on Our Plan and to find out about events near you.

- www.facebook.com/OurPlanSH
- @OurPlanSH

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