

Newsletter update

Land north of Oak Road, West Hill

OCTOBER 2021

Morrish Homes is promoting a site off Oak Road in West Hill for residential development of circa 23 new homes through East Devon District Council's Local Plan Review. As part of this process, the project team held a public consultation event to provide information to the local community on the evolving plans and to gain initial feedback.

The event was held at West Hill Village Hall on Friday 10th September 2021 from 4.30pm until 8pm. The project team were on hand to discuss the draft proposals and to answer questions. The team would like to thank all those who took the time to attend and share their views with us.

This newsletter summarises the key questions and topics that were discussed on the day and feedback we have received through the online and Freepost consultation channels. We hope it will be of interest.



Key topics covered inside:

- 1) Does West Hill need more houses?
- 2) How can West Hill's village character be preserved if more houses are built?
- 3) Would the local road network be able to cope with more traffic?
- 4) How will local facilities and amenities cope with new residents coming in?
- 5) Are the village's facilities and amenities not too far away from the site to walk and cycle?
- 6) What about road safety on the narrow local roads?
- 7) How will potential flooding be managed?
- 8) How do the draft plans adhere to local planning policy?
- 9) Are you trying to fit too many houses onto this site?
- 10) What will the impact be on local wildlife and habitats?

Does West Hill need more houses?

There is a pressing need in the district of East Devon for high-quality housing on sites that are deemed suitable for development. The Council are in the process of assessing suitable sites through the Local Plan review, Morrish Homes have put land north of Oak Road forward for circa 35 new homes under the call for sites submission, though as noted at our consultation, due to site constraints this number has reduced and is now closer to circa 23 new homes.

The need for new housing is district-wide and apart from considering whole new settlements, the Council will need to look at sustainable and controlled growth of existing towns and villages. New settlements are difficult to bring forward within a given timeframe due to the range of requirements such as road network infrastructure, which require extensive funding which often needs to be provided by the Government.

Such developments often encounter delays for various reasons which becomes problematic for the Council's 5-year housing land supply, a method in which the Government stimulates local authorities to bring forward new housing in a timely fashion. According to the Government's housing calculation method, East Devon needs to deliver around 1,000 homes each year to meet demand.

As acknowledged in the Neighbourhood Plan, West Hill is a village with a good level of amenities and facilities and is well situated, at a commutable distance from employment hubs such as Exeter and Axminster, and can accommodate a level of growth. Once planning applications for proposed housing sites start to come forward, it is important to bear in mind that all applications are judged on their own merits, and it is the planning system's task to ensure only the best proposals come forward.

How can West Hill's village character be preserved if more houses are built?

East Devon District Council will assess the site and its relation to West Hill as a whole in its Local Plan Review. Morrish Homes consider that a housing development of up to 23 homes would be proportional in size and that it would be possible to bring forward a development that would fit well into its immediate surroundings and the wider village setting.

The site adjoins the built-up area of West Hill and would form a natural extension of the village. The site is well contained due to established landscape features such as existing hedgerows and the project team would look to ensure that any new homes would be sensitively positioned, with a care to reduce outside views.

Would the local road network be able to cope with more traffic?

Morrish Homes have appointed Hydrock, a multidisciplinary engineering design consultancy, to provide the required transport planning services for the project. They will assist with the traffic and access aspects of any proposed development coming forward working closely with East Devon District Council as the Local Planning Authority and Devon County Council as the Highways Authority.

Based on 23 new homes, the increase in car traffic associated with the site is expected to be 1 car per 4 minutes during the morning and evening peak hours (circa 10-15 vehicle movements). The village's amenities are situated closely enough for future residents to walk or cycle, further limiting the number of vehicle movements coming from and going to the site. A full transport assessment will be submitted alongside any future planning application, which will be available for public viewing on the Council's planning portal in due course.





View of the site

How will local facilities and amenities cope with new residents coming in?

East Devon District Council will consider the site during the Local Plan Review process and assess its suitability for housing, which includes proximity to local services, facilities and amenities.

By the time a planning application is submitted, there will also be consultation with all relevant professional bodies and the public during the planning process, including the NHS for health care provision and Devon County Council in respect of road capacity and education, to name but a few.

Should a housing development come forward on this site, the Council will require Morrish Homes to provide Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to the Council which can be used for any improvements to local services should they be required.

Are the village's facilities and amenities not too far away from the site to walk and cycle?

Most of the village's amenities and services such as the shop, primary school, village hall, post office etc. are within 1600m indicative pedestrian walking distance which, according to current planning/highways guidance, is an acceptable distance for walking and cycling.

Given the topography of the surroundings, residents may consider investing in an electric bike to deal more easily with steeper gradients within the village which are also considered to make the landscape an attractive place to live.



Oak Road

What about road safety on the narrow local roads?

Road safety will be assessed thoroughly as part of any future planning application. The increase in traffic associated with up to 23 homes is not considered to significantly impact the local road network, its capacity or safety.

The transport consultant will work with the Highways Authority to ensure that the access provision is safe. Since Oak Road is a countryside road, it is not expected that the Highways Authority will ask for segregated foot- and cycle paths because that would alter the nature and look of the road. However, mitigation measures such as traffic calming could be considered.



How will potential flooding be managed?

The site is in Flood Zone 1, which is land with the least chance of flooding. As part of any future planning application, Morrish Homes will appoint a drainage consultant to work out a drainage strategy for the site. Drainage engineers have already undertaken an initial flood risk assessment, along with engaging with the Water Authority and Environment Agency, no issues are anticipated at this point.

Usually, flooding can be avoided and suitable drainage achieved by restricting and controlling surface run-off flows from the site to ensure that flood risk downstream is at least not increased, but even reduced. The impacts of climate change will be taken into consideration. The drainage consultant will liaise closely with Devon County Council as the relevant authority for this particular technical aspect.

How do the draft plans adhere to local planning policy?

It is recognised in the Neighbourhood Plan that West Hill would be able to sustain a level of growth and the site is on the southern side of the village, which is preferred. Morrish Homes are promoting the site north of Oak Road as part of East Devon District Council's Local Plan Review, and the Council will assess the site's suitability for housing. If deemed acceptable the site could become a draft allocation in the emerging Local Plan. If that Plan is eventually adopted, expected in 2023, a draft allocation would become an allocated site, earmarked for residential development.

Are you trying to fit too many houses onto this site?

With a revised layout of approximately 23 homes, reduced from an initial 35, on a site measuring just under 5 acres (approximately 2 hectares), Morrish Homes are looking at a layout that would complement the village and comply with both local and national policies at the time of an application being submitted.

There would be enough space for the houses, internal roads, car parking and gardens, and also for public open greenspace for residents and visitors to enjoy, in keeping with what would be expected in a village / semi-rural setting.



View of the site

What will the impact be on local wildlife and habitats?

Professional ecologists have ongoing survey work, due to be completed before the end of the year. This initial assessment work will assess in detail any future proposals, along with identifying any future surveys and reports.

Apart from avoiding impacts, the ecologist will put forward possible measures that can be considered to mitigate any potential impacts on wildlife. Beyond just mitigation, the project team will look at measures to enhance and improve the site, for example by improving habitats such as the sensitive management of trees and hedges or by enhancing and enriching the habitats by use of ecology buffers and corridors to ensure safe and secure habitats thrive. Other examples include the careful planting of native species in the site's hedgerows.