



Candidate Questionnaire

Please complete by typing your responses in to the appropriate boxes or by typing an 'X' in the relevant tick-box where appropriate, then save the file as 'Your_Name.pdf' and email it back to southhamssociety@gmail.com.

Your name:

Ben Cooper

Political allegiance:

Labour Party

Ward in which standing:

Dartmouth and East Dart

Housing

According to the *Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan: The Housing Market Area and Updating the Objectively Assessed Need*, in the 20 years between 2014 and 2034 a further 3,924 homes would have to be built to meet the objectively assessed housing requirement, or an average of 196 new dwellings each year.

However, in the seven years between 2014 and 2021, no fewer than 2,957* of those dwellings were actually delivered, at an average of more than 420 a year. Then, in 2021/22, an additional 454 were added to the total.

Nor are we due to stop building any time soon. The Council's Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals for 2023/24 is assuming that the number of properties is to increase by 500 per annum from 2023/24 onwards, while the Authorities Monitoring Report 2020-21 tells us there are 6,869 homes secured by planning permission that have yet to start construction.

In other words, we are building many more houses than were required.

Do you believe that we should continue building at the rate 500 new homes each year for the foreseeable future?

Yes:



No:

Other:

As someone who was born, raised and wants to be able to have my future here in Dartmouth - I know just how difficult it is to be able to either buy your own home or secure a long term, affordable rental property which isn't turned into a holiday let in the summer.

We need to build more homes which have restrictions in place which means they must be lived in and not rented out.

* Plymouth, South Hams & West Devon Local Planning Authorities' 2021, 5 Year Housing Land Supply Position Statement November 2021



Housing/continued

Taking the number of dwellings that have already been built and the number of homes secured by planning permission that have yet to start construction, we are going to be able to construct 2.5 times more homes than the JLP said were required.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, do you believe we should give consent for any more, other than possibly homes for social rent, before the next Joint Local Plan is approved?

Yes:

No:

Other:

(If you wish to give an explanation or your reasoning please type in the box below)

The housing situation in the South Hams, unless you already own your own home or have secured social rent, is very difficult and not getting any better. I have seen friends move away because they cannot afford to live here on the relatively low wages many of our jobs locally in hospitality, retail and the public sector pay.

Local communities should have more say on housing, and new housing should come with more social rent and genuinely affordable options for those with a connection to the area.

But we do need to build more homes which are not allowed to be bought for holiday lets or be bought up by private landlords to rent out at rates which are unaffordable.

At a density of just over eight dwellings per acre, using the Bloor Homes land At Sx 651 560 development at Filham as an example, accommodating 500 new homes each year will require a further 60 acres of land to be found. That will be the equivalent of imposing another settlement the size of Marlborough on the landscape every year.

Where do you suggest that land can be found?

With over 100 towns, villages and hamlets in the South Hams, we are talking about building no more than than 5 homes per settlement per year. This doesn't necessarily need to involve building big estates or whole new settlements, but working with local communities you could find space which is appropriate to build the homes we need to keep our great communities thriving.

In places like I want to represent - Dartmouth, Stoke Gabriel and Kingswear, but also the likes of Salcombe - the number of second homes and holiday lets are huge, and whilst our local economy undoubtedly needs visitors - we also need people to be able to afford to live here to do the jobs in hospitality, retail and the public sector our area needs to keep it such a wonderful place to live, retire, visit and bring up families.



Social Housing

Figures from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities suggest that in the ten years until March 2022 no more than 24 social homes were built in the South Hams. Over the same period 107 social homes were sold. In other words 83 social homes have been lost while, in March 2022, there were no fewer than 1,795 people in the South Hams on the local authority waiting list for social housing.

Do you believe South Hams District Council should build homes for social rent?

Yes:

No:

Other:

Please add any further thoughts you might have below and say what other steps you think the District Council could take to resolve this problem.

Firstly, the council should not allow developers to dodge their commitments to build social rent and affordable properties. All too often you see the percentage of affordable/social homes being pushed down to the bare minimum so they can make as much profit as possible with no benefit to the local area.

Further to this, South Hams should take inspiration from councils around the country and start their own major house building programme. Such community focused and locally led house building by South Hams District Council could help revitalise many of our local communities by providing the homes we need, where we need them, not where developers want them.

Without more affordable homes which are lived in full time, more of our are at risk of closing down over the winter and that is not good for our businesses, the people who live here or visitors.

As private rents are so high, often more than the equivalent mortgage repayments - havng more social rent properties available in the South Hams would also really help young people and families save for a deposit to buy their own home, freeing up the home for the next generation to do the same.



Wind Turbines

The Government is proposing changes to the existing National Planning Policy Framework to enable many more wind turbines to be installed through Local Development Orders, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders, 'providing it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by the affected local community have been appropriately addressed and the proposal has community support.'

Do you believe that the 'affected local community' should be defined as

- a) those living in the South Hams?
- b) those living within audible distance and/or one mile of the proposed turbines?
- c) Other

Do you believe the decision to grant approval should be taken by officers and members:

- a) after the application has been advertised?
- b) only after the 'affected local community' has voted in a referendum?
- c) Other

If you select 'Other' to either of the above, please explain why below.

As part of our energy mix, I see wind power as one of the key ways we achieve our commitments to reduce our reliance on oil and gas - the climate crisis needs immediate action and onshore wind is one of the cheapest and quickest forms of green energy we have.

If applications come forward to the council, elected members must consult local residents but I would stop short of a referendum on the issue.

A good councillor should be able to talk and listen to those in their ward, and ultimately make the choice they feel is in the best interest of their local community.



Solar Farms

Do you believe the climate emergency requires us to give up more of our agricultural land in order to accommodate solar panels?

Yes: No: Other:

If **Yes**, do you believe that should apply as much to land inside the AONB as without? If **Other**, please explain why below.

Yes: No: Other:

If **No**, please say where else can solar panels be accommodated other than on agricultural land? If **Other**, please explain why

I wouldn't want to stop farmers from diversifying their farms to make them more sustainable, however throughout the South Hams we have agricultural buildings, council owned properties, community halls and schools all without solar panels on them - so we should start by installing them on those buildings

We should also demand every new build home has solar panels as standard and do more to help residents and businesses install them retrospectively on their homes and commercial properties - this will not only help with the climate crisis we are facing but also with fluctuating energy costs.

So whilst I would not stop farmers from using their land to create green energy, I'd much rather South Hams District Council do more through planning and on its own land and buildings to meet our green energy commitments - including installing solar panels over its car parks where appropriate, such as the park and ride in Dartmouth.

Planning Enforcement

To quote Ian Tant, President, Royal Town Planning Institute 2019: 'Successful planning relies on three essential areas of work by our local authorities: visionary plan-making which sets out the policies and proposals for the area; efficient and effective development management, which applies those local and national policies in the determination of planning applications; and well-resourced and effective enforcement. These three aspects go hand-in-hand.'

Unfortunately effective enforcement costs money, and there are many who believe that the LPA has been less than proactive in ensuring that developers and others comply with the conditions imposed by their consents.

Do you believe that the LPA has been sufficiently proactive in ensuring that developers and others comply with the conditions imposed by their consents?

Yes: No:

If **No**, please answer the first question on the next

page.

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Planning Enforcement/continued

If you have answered **No** to the last question on the previous page, what would you suggest?

The Local Planning Authority seem very slow to act on planning enforcement, this is eroding trust in the process and is not good for the community at large.

All too often, those developing, renovating or building homes seem oblivious to their responsibility to abide by the rules and feel they can misuee retrospective planning instead of going through the correct process.

Whilst I have some sympathy with the LPA, I feel it does largely come down to money and without proper funding developers and individuals will continue to try and bulldoze their way through the system, ignoring the conditions imposed on them.

Without more money and personal, not only to challenge breaches, but regularly check on developments I can't see how we can restore trust in the process and make it a more proactive system which can stop breaches before any damage is done.

Environmental Impacts

Do you believe pollution is adversely impacting our rivers or rias or beaches?

Yes:

No:

If Yes, how can the problem(s) best be addressed?

In the ward I am seeking to represent, data collected by The Rivers Trust shows that between just Stoke Gabriel and Dartmouth sewers overflows spilled 872 times for a total of 2,191 hours in 2022 - this is unacceptable and must be stopped.

We must work with our Member of Parliament, as well as with Town and Parish Councils and urge South Hams District Council to pressure the government to make South West Water clean up not just the River Dart but all our waterways by enforcing tougher action when they discharge pollution - it's management shouldn't be enjoying big pay increases and bonuses whilst our waterways continue to be polluted.

i also think we should also explore designating more of our water as bathing water, this will ensure regular checks take place and we can make sure our water quality is kept at a high level for those who enjoy swimming and using our rivers and beaches.



Environmental Impacts/continued

Do you believe there are air quality problems that need addressing in the South Hams?

Yes:



No:

If Yes, how can the problem(s) best be addressed?

Whilst not an issue which impacts large swathes of the South Hams, air quality in some of our towns, villages and along our major roads can and needs to be improved.

Firstly, we need greener, cheaper and more regular public transport which links our towns and villages to get cars off the road. South Hams District Council need to take the lead in improving our electric car infrastructure, this would help more people make the transition to electric and get polluting vehicles off our roads.

We also need to encourage, where possible, more people to walk, cycle and car share to work, school and shop - improving cycle and walking routes between our homes and where we need to get too to live our lives.

The council must also protect and plant more trees and hedges, these are obviously vital to help improve our air quality by removing dangerous pollution which is released into the air.

Trees

The loss of many of our mature trees as a consequence of unauthorised felling, often as a precursor to a planning application being submitted, has long been a problem in the South Hams. Yet we have only the one tree officer, who we also have to share with West Devon. Consequently the combined area for which he is responsible totals 2,047.6 square kilometres. By comparison, East Devon has three tree officers to cover 814.3 square kilometres, or a far more manageable individual average of 271.4 square kilometres.

Would you be in favour of resourcing the tree protection function on a similar basis to East Devon?

Yes:



No:



Other Issues

There may also be other issues affecting the natural and built environment of the South Hams that you think the District Council, in addition to those identified above, can and should be addressing.

Please detail those here:

• Support for the High Street:

High rents, rates and energy bills means many of us have noticed local shops, restaurants and cafes have been closing - the government and council should be doing more to support our high streets and I fail to see a plan.

Along with more support, I want to see Banking Hubs set up in places like Dartmouth which have lost its banks to help people and businesses access the banking services they need, doing so would fill an empty shop and bring people onto the high street.

• Cleaner Streets and Parks:

Our beautiful towns, villages and parks could look so much better - we need more street cleaning and to have our public bins emptied more regularly. We also need to do more to deal with fly-tipping, plant more trees and and wildflowers to help keep our communities looking how we want them too.

• A Visitor Charge for the South Hams:

Following the news Manchester has become the first UK destination to introduce a visitor charge, it is time for the South Hams to look at implementing one on overnight stays here.

A £1 charge, per adult per night, could raise millions of pounds for the local authority which should be ringfenced to help improve the natural and built environment of the South Hams for residents and future visitors alike.

If you want to know more about my campaign or want to contact me to ask me a question either email me on ben4dart@gmail.com or follow my Facebook page: www.facebook.com/Ben4Dartmouth



Date completed:

Tuesday, 11 April 2023