



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 southhamsociety@gmail.com.

Your name:

John Birch

Political allegiance:

Liberal Democrats

Ward in which standing:

Totnes

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:

My position on the matter of housing is set out in the Lib Dem's SHDC 2023 Election Manifesto which can be found at www.southhamslibdems.org.uk/local-manifesto.

One of the priorities for the new administration at South Hams District Council should be to address the local housing needs of young working families and the elderly. There is a local housing crisis and it needs addressing sooner rather than later.

The Liberal Democrats will make housing needs one of its priorities and its plan of action is set out in its recently published South Hams manifesto.

* *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)

Planning applications for housing developments within South Hams are required to comply with the provisions of the JLP

To abandon the JLP will require the agreement of the three constituent authorities, South Hams, West Devon and Plymouth, and I am not sure it would be in our best interest to seek to opt out. My view as a Totnes councillor is that as far as Totnes is concerned it offers a measure of protection against overdevelopment.

Its weakness is its failure to address the need for adequate and suitable infrastructure. However, there is a review process leading to possible revisions in the near future. That should provide an opportunity to address the weaknesses.

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?

Land needs to be identified to address the shortage of affordable social housing and this task should be undertaken by SHDC working with town and parish councils, housing associations and other relevant bodies



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.

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When the current Conservative administration took office at the South Hams District Council in May 2019 the Council's housing waiting list showed that there were 693 people in urgent need of affordable rented accommodation. Four years later the figure has gone up by 10% to 766. The Conservatives have failed to set about reducing the housing waiting list or come up with any development plans of substance.

This trend should be reversed. The Liberal Democrats support the campaign to progress the ATMOS community project at the former Dairy Crest site. This project aims to deliver 65 much-needed genuine affordable homes for local residents as well as employment for at least 160 people.

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It is projects like these that are needed to reduce the housing waiting list and at the same time have the support of the community



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.

Answer to Q1.

All those town and parish councils situated within five miles of the proposed turbine.

Answer to Q2

The decision making process requires careful consideration before being determined.



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

Each and every application should be considered on its merits taking into account all relevant planning policies and climate emergency requirements.

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.



Planning Enforcement/continued

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

My position is set out in the Lib Dem's SHDC 2023 Election Manifesto which can be found at www.southhamslibdems.org.uk/local-manifesto. Planning enforcement at SHDC is under-resourced.

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?

This is a national problem and requires national government legislation to enable the problem to be addressed. SHDC should put pressure on national government to address this problem sooner rather than later.



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?

This is a national problem and requires national government legislation to enable the problem to be addressed. SHDC should put pressure on national government to address this problem sooner rather than later.

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:

The Liberal Democrats' position in respect of all matters within the control of SHDC is set out in its manifesto for the SHDC 2023 Election and as such covers other issues. The manifesto can be found at www.southhamslibdems.org.uk/local-manifesto.

Date completed:

16 April 2023