

Torbay Local Plan 2025-45 Reg 19

Teignbridge District Consultation Response September 2026

Introduction

Teignbridge congratulates Torbay on publishing its Regulation 19 Local Plan, especially given recent intervention difficulties. On the whole, the Plan is a comprehensive well-presented document that builds on the previous draft versions with many elements of policy supported by Teignbridge. Key components, such as Shared Vision and Spatial Strategy offer a very clear approach towards shaping places and making the most of local identity with the waterfront and harbourside related plans both ambitious and far-reaching.

The Plan proposes housing provision significantly below the identified level of housing need, delivering approximately 400 homes per annum against a local housing need figure of 972 homes per annum. Teignbridge recognises the constraints affecting Torbay, particularly its constrained geographic size, and accepts that accommodating the full level of need is likely to be challenging. However, we remain concerned that the evidence has not yet demonstrated that all reasonable opportunities to increase housing provision have been fully explored.

We acknowledge the publication of Topic Paper 1: Strategy and Growth Level Justification August 2026 to justify this low level of provision and welcome the opportunity to comment on the Local Plan, Topic Paper 1 and the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Potential Future Growth Areas, prepared by Stephenson Halliday.

Local Plan

Chapter 1 – Our shared vision

Para 1.49 ‘Although Torbay is a largely self-contained housing market area (HMA) and Functional Economic market Area (FEMA), its population growth is entirely driven by inwards migration. This is largely from people moving from elsewhere in the UK. Whilst the closest neighbours are Teignbridge and South Hams, the council considers that unmet housing need, (as calculated by the Standard Method and demographic projections) is a sub-regional matter that needs to be resolved in cooperation with wider Devon Authorities through the Spatial Development Strategy’

Teignbridge has some concerns regarding the approach taken in paragraph 1.49 and, in particular, the expectation that unmet housing need will be addressed at a wider sub-regional level. Whilst there are merits to this approach in the long term, via the SDS, in the short term, every attempt should be made to explore possible additional development sites within Torbay.

The Plan anticipates that a significant element of unmet housing need may ultimately need to be considered through future sub-regional planning arrangements. However, there has been limited discussion to date regarding the scale, distribution and practical implications of such an approach.

Depending on the outcome of the LGR Review, if the low level of housing provision is accepted through the Examination of the Torbay Local Plan, this immediately places any new unitary authority, which includes the former Torbay area, on the back foot in terms of meeting housing needs.

Whilst there is no longer a formal Duty to Cooperate, this cross-boundary matter has been the subject of limited discussions with local authorities within the sub-region, including Teignbridge, to resolve. Whilst the emerging Spatial Development Strategy may provide an appropriate mechanism for considering strategic growth issues in the longer term, Teignbridge considers that the Local Plan should set out more clearly the extent of any anticipated unmet need and how this issue could be addressed.

In addition, the assessment that ‘population growth is entirely driven by inwards migration’ represents an over-simplification of population trends for Torbay. It is clear from ONS based data for the period 2011 to 2021, that such growth reflects a combination of demographic changes rather than purely migration-driven, implying that indigenous factors still contribute, alongside migration to the overall population increase. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that inward migration has been particularly marked in recent years, as detailed in Public Health population overviews prepared by the council.

Chapter 2 – Strategy

The Plan presents a very clear approach towards shaping places and making the most of local identity and the physical environment of Torbay, including the Torbay Premier Marine & Natural Experience concept.

Explanation of Spatial Strategy and Area Policies

‘The Plan relies very heavily on regeneration of brownfield sites and other urban areas to maximise its development opportunities and deliver on town centre regeneration programmes, drawing investment into our towns and breathing life into our town centres. The Local Plan contains a brownfield Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development and is highly supportive of urban brownfield development, especially in town centres.’ (para 2.1)

Whilst the principles contained in para 2.1 are sound, it is questioned how much they differ from the current Torbay Local Plan approach, which has not delivered enough new housing over the last decade, and how much certainty can be given to others, including the Planning Inspectorate, that sites will be developed in a timely way.

The proposed level of housing provision remains substantially below the identified housing need figure. Whilst Teignbridge acknowledges the constraints identified by Torbay Council, it is not yet clear that every reasonable opportunity for additional growth has been assessed before reaching this level of provision. Torbay has a population of about 140k. The proposed housing delivery rate appears low when considered against the scale of identified housing need and the size of Torbay's resident population. In comparison, Teignbridge has a resident population of 131k and new local plan will provide for 720 homes a year. There are several other examples of higher levels of housing provision in similarly constrained coastal bounded Local Planning Authorities in the southwest.

Strategic Policy SDT1: Torquay

'Torquay will deliver a minimum of 37,000 square metres (net) of Class E(g), B1 or B2 employment floorspace and at least 3,600 new homes over the Plan period, equal to an average of around 180 dwellings a year over the Plan period 2022-42.'

It would be helpful to identify how much new development is allocated in the Plan and how much is rolled over from adopted plan, in places such as Strategic Policies H1-3 in Chapter 3 this distinction is rather blurred.

In relation to the following item: *'A strategic green gap between Torquay and Kingskerswell will be maintained'* it must be emphasized that such a green gap policy cannot be applied to those areas beyond the plan area, particularly where the developed area of Torquay, east of Kingskerswell Cross, immediately adjoins the council/plan area boundary. These areas will be addressed in landscape terms by the requirements of Policy EN1: Setting of Settlements from the Teignbridge Local Plan 2020 - 2040 which represents an updated approach from the outstanding open breaks method followed by the adopted Teignbridge Local Plan. Residential development in this area of Torbay could be considered, as Policy EN1 would ensure that the settings of both Kingskerswell village and Torquay were conserved and enhanced and would prevent coalescence. (Policy EN1: Setting of Settlements is included at the end of these comments).

Strategic Policy SDT3: Torquay Gateway

The inclusion of the requirement for a transit site for gypsies & travellers in the third point of the policy causes some concern. Traveller sites are difficult to deliver and as the site would not be located on a main through route, its merit is questioned. However, it is acknowledged that the evidence has shown there is no requirement for this provision.

Chapter 3 – Housing and Regeneration policies

Strategic Policy HS: Overall Housing Strategy and Presumption in favour of Urban Regeneration

Teignbridge remains concerned that the Plan relies on a relatively limited portfolio of development opportunities and that the overall housing strategy may not provide

sufficient flexibility to maximise delivery over the plan period. As such bullet vi is considered too strict:

‘Major greenfield development outside of the built-up area or Future Growth Areas will be resisted, unless brought forward through a Neighbourhood Plan or area allocation development plan document, or meets the requirements of the Affordable Housing Exceptions Sites Policy H8.’

The limitations on the strategy of seeking to focus on previously developed land within the built-up area, as a major priority, appears to comprise of fundamental points which will place a firm brake on the actual level of housing development coming forward:

Para 3.6: *‘It is acknowledged that much of the urban area contains constraints such as flood risk and other infrastructure issues. In addition, a significant part of the built-up area, including the three town centres, are designated conservation areas. Nevertheless, the Plan’s key focus is to develop in these locations due to their wider sustainability benefits.’*

Although we recognise consistency with most recent trends of supply, the proposed rate of windfalls at 120 dpa, identified in para 3.10 may not be realistic going forward as land becomes increasingly constrained.

Town Centre Regeneration Areas, identified in Table 3 and H1 may not be sufficiently robust in terms of potential deliverability of housing, the supporting technical work identified, para 3.18 is open-ended.

Timings of the identified brown field regeneration sites may need a significant amount of negotiation with landowners and preparatory work before development comes forward. In some ways the approach towards housing strategy/delivery is similar to that followed in current Torbay Local Plan and which has not delivered enough housing.

Collectively, these factors create uncertainty regarding the extent to which the Plan has identified the maximum realistic level of housing growth capable of being delivered within Torbay.

Policy SP H2: Future Growth Areas

This policy provides the main basis for new housing development in the plan area. A number of the proposed growth areas build upon existing allocations and are dependent upon updated masterplanning work. Whilst this approach is understandable, additional confidence would be provided if the evidence demonstrated more clearly the extent to which further opportunities for growth have been considered.

Policy SP H3: Other Local Plan allocated sites

Contain most new housing sites, but status is unclear, appears to be a mix of sites that have come from HELAA process, some have planning permission and therefore maybe should not be an allocation. Position requires more clarification in supporting text.

Policy H4: Minimum density

The policy has a reasonable intent but does not include specific criteria to be helpful to the plan user/developer. The policy should clarify what is meant by high density development. It should also support building upwards, to maximise use of air space.

Policy H5: Conversion of buildings into flats

The policy is well intended but items 2 and 3 are slightly oblique and it is not clear how policy compliance would be demonstrated.

Policy H6: Loss of homes

The policy should relate to existing sub-standard dwellings only. Criterion 1 could be argued in cases where existing dwellings are of a good standard of amenity, but the proposed combined new dwelling improves this further, which is not the intention of the policy.

Potential amended wording for criterion 1 along the lines of:

‘The proposal would result in improved standard of accommodation and improved living conditions in situations where the existing standard and conditions are poor.’

Policy H13: Sites for travellers

It would be helpful to specify the number of transit pitches that will be delivered on both allocated sites (or alternatives) and expand explanation to include the number of transit pitches identified as required in the needs assessment.

Chapter 4 – Economy, Tourism and Retail

Torbay Economic Growth Strategy anchors the policy approach towards the Economy and Employment Land. Emphasis on land use framework which support the maintenance and expansion of hi-tech industries, such as photonics, electronics, and medical technology is acknowledged.

Main content of employment provision, strategic allocations under E1 all seem well-evidenced and clearly expressed. Also, E2: Employment area renewal and modernisation is a well-balanced protective policy concerning existing employment estates, along with E4.

Policy TOS: Sustainable tourism and cultural investment strategy

Comprehensive lead policy although item 4 is considered to lack flexibility: *‘Resisting the provision of small apartments, hostels, houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) or other incompatible uses in tourism areas.’* A balance should be sought between supporting both new homes and the tourism industry. It is likely that some forms of small apartments, hostels and HMOs will be compatible with tourism uses and the policy should allow for this.

Policy TO5: New holiday parks and extensions to existing facilities

It is difficult to see how holiday parks are, in principle, able to be extended in area. This proposal implies there are undeveloped areas suitable for development, which could instead include residential development and help contribute towards the OAN.

Chapter 5 – Thriving communities

Policy SC4: Sustainable food production and land protection

Whilst Teignbridge supports the protection of best and most versatile agricultural land, consideration should also be given to the significant housing challenges identified within the Plan area. A more balanced policy approach may assist in ensuring that all reasonable development opportunities can be properly assessed on their merits.

Whilst a balanced approach is needed to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land, given the lack of housing delivered by the plan, it is suggested that the policy should include a site size threshold criterion, or a more balanced approach to the provision of other benefits, such as housing.

Chapter 8 – Climate Change

Policy CER4: Renewable and low carbon energy generation

The stance of CER4 is fine but policy ambition does not go much beyond the NPPF. It would be improved by including something more specific to Torbay about future renewable energy development.

Chapter 9 – Our Natural Places

Policy L4: Valued landscapes

‘Locally valued landscape is not limited to the undeveloped coast and may be identified through the Torbay Landscape Character Assessment.’

Extract above lacks clarity. The “explanation” text is helpful, setting out that valued landscapes include but are not limited to the South Devon National Landscape and its setting, undeveloped coast, land within or in the setting of a designated heritage asset, urban landscapes such as Local Green Spaces (LGS) and Urban Landscape Protection Areas (ULPAs). However, these are all protected through other plan policies and the policy appears to duplicate this and be unnecessary. Furthermore, the Landscape Character Assessment does not highlight any particular areas of local valued landscapes, so it is unclear to the reader which areas are considered to form locally valued landscapes. Given the lack of housing allocated in the plan, a less restrictive approach would be considered more balanced.

Policy NC1: Biodiversity and ecology

NC1 would benefit from some flexibility, through protection being commensurate with the importance of the site – e.g. would development be refused if it caused minor adverse impact on an “OSWI”?

Policy NC2: Species of principal importance

It is not clear why specific reference is made to Cirl Buntings, given the inclusion of European Protected Species (EPS), Nationally Protected Species, Section 41 Priority Species, or Devon Local Priority and Special Species in the opening line.

Chapter 11 – Designed with quality

Policy DE2: Building for a Healthy Life (second para)

‘Under the BHL12 ‘traffic light’ system, a development proposal will be supported by the council when it secures as many ‘green lights’ as possible.’

This part of the policy lacks clarity and should set the standard required or the standard below which would be refused.

Sustainability Appraisal

The SA (in relation to the spatial strategy) makes some assumptions that are not agreed with in terms of presumptions that greater harm will occur as the scale of development increases. It is not considered that this is necessarily always the case, as a sensitively designed larger development may have less impact than a poorly designed smaller one.

There does not appear to have been sufficient consideration of the policy safeguards in place that would mitigate possible harmful impacts. In relation to reducing poverty and income inequality, larger scale developments score worse as they may raise concern about over-intensive development. The relationship between concern over new development and poverty/income poverty is not understood.

Therefore, there are aspects of the SA of Reasonable Alternatives that appear to be prejudiced against a larger quantum of development.

Topic Paper

Topic Paper 1 sets out a justification for the proposed low level of growth in the Plan.

Whilst Teignbridge accepts that there are some absolute constraints to development, Teignbridge shares many of the constraints highlighted in this Paper as preventing additional development allocations. However, Teignbridge has proved successful in accommodating its full OAN, albeit under the previous (capped) standard method, in its recently adopted Plan. This presented significant challenges, but the enthusiasm of the team and close collaborative working with Local Members and Neighbouring Authorities helped to make this happen.

Given the comparable environmental, infrastructure and landscape constraints affecting many neighbouring authorities, including Teignbridge, it is difficult to conclude from the evidence presented that the level of housing provision proposed in the Plan

represents the maximum amount of development that could reasonably be accommodated.

The principal area of concern relates to the significant weight afforded to landscape sensitivity in the assessment of future growth opportunities.

Para 4.15 sets out that *MHCLG has requested that the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment evidence be revisited to consider whether other development opportunities, including smaller areas with development potential can be identified.*

This is strongly supported by Teignbridge – see comments on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment – as it is considered that the approach taken to accommodating development in areas of moderate or high landscape sensitivity may be overly restrictive. Teignbridge considers that a more balanced approach may be possible, recognising that landscape sensitivity does not necessarily preclude development where appropriate mitigation, design measures and landscape-led masterplanning can be secured.

Para 4.17 - In terms of the Reasonable Alternatives considered through the SA, the fact that a lower quantum of development generally performs better against environmental objectives is not something individual to Torbay but would be the case anywhere.

Para 4.24 and Figure 6 show a hugely over-simplified perspective, comparing land area alone of neighbouring and nearby authorities. This completely ignores the large swathes of these authorities that are subject to significant constraints – such as globally important clay minerals, European Wildlife Sites, flood risk, steep topography etc.

Para 4.25- It is worth noting that, following the announcement of LGR, Teignbridge is currently considering pausing preparation of the Local Plan pending the publication of Transitional Arrangements.

Section 5 of the Topic Paper summarises the constraints affecting Torbay. It is accepted that the geographic area of Torbay is limited in size, however, many other constraints affect neighbouring and nearby authorities. Comparing Teignbridge to the constraints set out affecting Torbay, there are many similarities:

- A significant proportion of Teignbridge is also BMV agricultural land and there is limited flat land.
- Improvements are needed to numerous WWTWs in Teignbridge to deliver the development allocated in the Teignbridge Local Plan – as highlighted through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This has not prevented development, despite needing consideration through HRA.
- A large part of Teignbridge is affected by the South Hams SAC, as well as the Exe Estuary SPA and Dawlish Warren SAC.
- There are 28 SSSIs in Teignbridge and numerous protected and priority species.

- Large parts of Teignbridge are adjacent to Dartmoor National Park.
- There are around 1,800 Listed Buildings, 35 Conservation Areas and 10 Registered Parks & gardens in Teignbridge.
- Large parts of the Bovey Basin in Teignbridge are safeguarded for globally important ball clay reserves.
- Some areas within Teignbridge are subject to challenging viability.

Therefore, it is difficult to accept that, whilst Teignbridge's Local Plan met in full its OAN of 720 homes per year, the Torbay Local Plan meets approximately 41% of its OAN, providing 400 homes per year. (See separate comments in relation to the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment)

Para 9.32 states that “the designation of CCMA's reduces the amount of land available for housing and other vulnerable forms of development and is an important consideration in the preparation of the Torbay Local Plan.” However, the CCMA does little to reduce land available for development, especially in relation to the local designation of Undeveloped Coast, where it could be argued a more flexible approach could be taken.

Section 10 highlights the constraints resulting from the South Hams SAC. Similarly, Teignbridge is significantly affected by this SAC, with the majority of its land, outside Dartmoor National Park, being included within either the Sustenance Zones or Landscape Connectivity Zones. Teignbridge is also similarly constrained by the presence of Cirl Buntings.

Major road network issues are highlighted in section 13. It appears that all resulting issues are restricted to additional delay, rather than creating safety concerns and do not therefore appear to be a reason for restricting development. Accommodating growth in traffic is a challenge for all Local Plans and significant travel mitigation is required through the Teignbridge Local Plan policies to enable growth.

Minerals constraints are highlighted in section 15. The map shows limited areas subject to safeguarding of Devonian Limestone. This could be considered less restrictive than the areas within Teignbridge that are subject to safeguarding for the globally important ball clay reserves as well as limestone.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

We note that you have published Landscape Sensitivity Assessments for key potential growth areas. These assess Landscape Value, Visual Value, Landscape Susceptibility, Visual Susceptibility and give conclusions for each area.

The Teignbridge Local Plan was also supported by individual Landscape Sensitivity Assessments for a number of sites, which assessed landscape value, landscape susceptibility, visual susceptibility and overall landscape sensitivity.

It appears that a significantly different approach has been taken to the outcome of Landscape Sensitivity Assessments by each authority.

Areas of development potential within Torbay that have been assessed as having lower landscape sensitivity than those in Teignbridge that have been allocated, seem to have been dismissed, whereas the now adopted Teignbridge Local Plan included sites of high and high-moderate landscape sensitivity. Rather than preventing development, these assessments were used to shape policy requirements and ensure a landscape-led approach to development.

Teignbridge considers that there may be opportunities to apply a more positive and mitigation-led interpretation of the findings of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, especially given the proven success at Examination of this approach as shown through the recently adopted Teignbridge Local Plan. The purpose of landscape sensitivity work is not solely to identify areas where development should be avoided, but also to inform how development can be successfully accommodated where it is considered necessary and appropriate.

Examples from the Landscape Sensitivity Assessments below:

Maidencombe Potential Future Growth Area: This area was assessed as having medium landscape value, medium-low visual value, medium landscape susceptibility and medium visual susceptibility. This level of landscape sensitivity is significantly lower than the levels of numerous allocated sites in the Teignbridge Local Plan (see examples below) but the Local Plan does not allocate development here.

Churston Potential Future Growth Area: This area was assessed as having high-medium landscape value, high-medium visual value, medium landscape susceptibility and high-medium visual susceptibility. This level of landscape sensitivity is similar to numerous allocated sites in the Teignbridge Local Plan (see examples below) but the Local Plan does not allocate even smaller scale development here.

Examples from Teignbridge Local Plan, adopted May 2026:

The LSA found Markham Village to have a moderate-high landscape value, moderate – high landscape susceptibility, high visual susceptibility and an overall high sensitivity to residential development. Nevertheless, the adopted Teignbridge Plan includes Policy EE1, an allocation for 900 homes, with policy requirements for specific landscaping measures to minimise potential landscape impacts to retain and reinforce the setting of Exeter, as informed by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, and avoidance of development of the upper slopes and ridges of the site.

The LSA found Attwells Farm to have a high-moderate landscape value, high-moderate landscape susceptibility, high-moderate visual susceptibility and an overall high-moderate sensitivity to residential development. Nevertheless, the adopted Teignbridge Plan includes Policy EE4, an allocation for 300 homes, with policy requirements for specific landscaping measures.

The LSA found Peamore and West Exe to have a moderate-high landscape value, moderate – high landscape susceptibility, moderate visual susceptibility and an overall moderate - high sensitivity to residential development. Nevertheless, the adopted Teignbridge Plan includes Policy EE2, an allocation for 845 homes and 19ha of employment, with policy requirements for landscaping measures to retain and reinforce the setting of Exeter, as informed by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, and design and layout solutions which reinforce the setting of the site as a prominent gateway to Exeter.

Conclusion

Teignbridge District Council supports many aspects of the Regulation 19 Torbay Local Plan, including its clear vision, placemaking ambitions, regeneration objectives, economic strategy, and commitment to enhancing Torbay's unique coastal character. The Plan contains many positive policy approaches which are generally well-presented and supported by a substantial evidence base. However, notwithstanding these strengths, Teignbridge must object to the Plan on soundness grounds.

The principal concern is that the Plan proposes delivery of only around 400 dwellings per annum against an identified housing need of 972 dwellings per annum, meeting only approximately 41% of the identified requirement. Whilst Teignbridge recognises the environmental, topographical and infrastructure constraints affecting Torbay, many neighbouring authorities face comparable challenges and have nevertheless sought to meet their housing needs in full through positively prepared plans.

The evidence presented has not sufficiently demonstrated that all reasonable opportunities to accommodate additional growth within Torbay have been exhausted. In particular, the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment and Topic Paper 1 appear to adopt a precautionary approach to landscape impacts, resulting in the exclusion of growth options that may be capable of accommodating development through appropriate mitigation, masterplanning and landscape-led design. Experience from the recently adopted Teignbridge Local Plan demonstrates that areas of moderate to high landscape sensitivity can be planned positively where robust policy safeguards are incorporated.

Teignbridge is also concerned by the Plan's reliance on a future sub-regional solution to address unmet housing need. The Plan acknowledges that a substantial proportion of identified housing need will not be met within Torbay, yet there has been limited engagement with neighbouring authorities regarding how, where, or whether this unmet need could be accommodated. No agreed mechanism currently exists to redistribute this scale of housing requirement, and no assurances have been provided by Teignbridge that it would be able to accommodate any proportion of Torbay's shortfall. Consequently, the Plan defers resolution of a significant strategic planning issue to a future Spatial Development Strategy whose scope, geography and timescales remain uncertain.

Furthermore, the housing strategy relies heavily on brownfield regeneration, windfall delivery and a relatively limited range of allocated sites, many of which are subject to significant delivery challenges. This raises concerns regarding the robustness, flexibility and deliverability of the housing trajectory over the plan period.

For these reasons, Teignbridge considers that the Plan has not demonstrated that it is positively prepared or that the proposed scale of housing provision represents the maximum reasonable level of growth capable of being accommodated within Torbay. The Council therefore objects to the Local Plan and requests that further work be undertaken through the Examination process to identify additional development opportunities, review the assumptions underpinning the landscape and constraints evidence, and provide a more robust strategy for addressing unmet housing need and its cross-boundary implications.

22 September 2026

Teignbridge Strategy & Policy Team

Teignbridge Local Plan 2020-2040

Policy EN1: Setting of Settlements

1. Landscapes that provide or contribute to the distinctive setting and separate identity of settlements within and adjacent to Teignbridge District will be conserved and enhanced.

2. To maintain the separate identity and physical separation of closely related settlements, development within the following gaps will be limited to that which retains its open character and contribution to the settlement's setting, and satisfies all criteria

3 (a)-(e) below:

- a. Newton Abbot – Abbotskerswell
- b. Newton Abbot – Kingskerswell – Torbay
- c. Newton Abbot – Kingsteignton
- d. Teignmouth - Bishopsteignton
- e. Shillingford Abbot – Markham Village - Ide

3. Development within the settings of settlements will be permitted where it:

- a. maintains their separate identity and avoids coalescence;
- b. maintains important views, either from publicly accessible viewpoints within the settlement, or of a settlement within its landscape setting;
- c. makes a positive contribution to the setting's character, distinct identity, and value to people;
- d. avoids distinct hills or ridges which form an undeveloped skyline; and
- e. does not result in the loss of important natural features and conserves or enhances the significance of heritage assets and their settings, including historic landscapes, that individually or collectively contribute to local identity.

From Supporting Text:

6.3 The policy includes landscapes that border the developed areas of Exeter City and Torbay and that lie close to villages within Dartmoor National Park. The landscape setting of these settlements outside the plan area will also be considered through this policy.