

## CULLOMPTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

### FOCUS GROUP ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

WEDNESDAY 30<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2014

#### Present:

Cathy Penharris, CNPSG; Jenny Penharris, CNPSG; Paul Edwards, Tiverton/Crediton Green Party; Stephen Powles, Mid Devon Natural History Society; Jenny Worsfold, Secretary Devon Footpaths; Nick Savage, member of Ramblers

Although unable to attend the meeting as representatives, we had some excellent information sent to us from the RSPB, DBRC and Environment Agency (attached).

All of those present have an interest in the Natural Environment and are keen to see policies in the Neighbourhood Plan to safeguard our countryside and habitats and to enhance the built and natural environment. The Neighbourhood Plan is an ideal opportunity for this to happen.

Quote from Gavin Bloomfield of the RSPB – “Conserving nature should primarily seek to retain the assets that already exist, and to then deliver prioritised ecological enhancements, either to make the existing assets better or to create more. The planning system should have a role in protecting key sites. With the evolution of the Community Infrastructure Levy, there is potentially a pot of money that could contribute towards biodiversity enhancements, and it may be that Neighbourhood Planning could have a role in defining the priorities for that within its geographical area.”

Robin Leivers of the Environmental Agency sent five maps – historic, flood zones south and north and areas at risk of surface water flooding south and north in Cullompton Parish.

Government policy given in the NPPF gives clear guidance that certain types of development in areas at risk of flooding, i.e. flood zones 2 and 3 should be avoided and the Environment Agency has given its own guidance to local planning authorities and applicants for lower risk developments. The NPPF states that any development in flood zone 2 and 3 will require a flood risk assessment.

With regard to surface water flooding the EA recommends consideration is given to whether any new development is shown or near an area of risk. Whether a property is at risk will depend on the accuracy of the mapping of the area and details of the property, e.g. how waterproof the structure is, the level of doors and airbricks, and whether the installation of any flood resilience measures such as airbrick covers and flood boards have been incorporated.

“Contains Environment Agency information ©Environment Agency and database right”

We have already circulated the Wildlife Site Resource Map and Species Information that the DBRC created for the Cullompton Neighbourhood Plan. The best practice approach is to avoid locating development on designated sites that have already been recognised for their high biodiversity value or semi-natural habitat. There are no **Statutory** sites within Cullompton Parish but a few **Non-Statutory Sites (County Wildlife Sites)** which are sites of county importance for wildlife. The NPPF framework requires local authorities to identify and map locally designated sites of biodiversity importance as part of the Local Plan process. **Other Sites of Wildlife Interest** are sites of significant wildlife interest within a local context that have been surveyed but do not reach the criteria for County Wildlife Sites and may be included in the Local Plan. The Cullompton Parish has 16 (**OSWI**).

There are 11 Development control species within Cullompton Parish and 27 other legally protected and notable species.

Included in the DBRC report are key principles to protect wildlife and geology in the Neighbourhood Plan.

It is very important to not only protect existing footpaths but to consider additional footpaths. There are three ways of doing this:

1. Protect historical footpaths
2. Create footpaths for the community by compensating landowners
3. Create permissive footpaths with agreement of landowners

Consideration should be given to footpaths between new developments, to the town centre and surgeries etc. and create healthy, traffic free routes. The footpath from Goblin Lane to Tiverton Road is a typical Devon footpath with high banks and wildflowers. This type of footpath could be created on new developments meaning less high maintenance. These footpaths should be well signposted.

The Neighbourhood Plan can have a say in the style of housing which are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping. They should also give consideration to our wildlife by allowing nesting provision for swifts and bats by leaving out one brick adjacent to the roof and making a space in fence panels for hedgehogs to be able to move from garden to garden and allow areas of meadowland to increase the natural habitat for wildflowers, insects etc.

This report is the first of feedback from the Natural Environment Focus Group and we will be meeting again in the near future.

**Cathy and Jenny Penharris**