

Torrige – a great place to live, work and visit

Riverbank House, Bideford, Devon, EX39 2QG



The Rt Hon Lee Rowley MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

14th February 2024

Dear Lee,

North Devon and Torrige Joint Local Plan

As Leaders of neighbouring District Councils in Northern Devon we would like to share with you some of our aspirations for Northern Devon and request your assistance in facilitating our desire to renew our Joint Local Plan under the emerging Planning Reforms at the earliest opportunity.

This letter will hopefully demonstrate that our working together collaboratively and in partnership in speedily developing a new Local Plan can achieve and deliver on the missions of the Government's Levelling Up agenda as well as our own local ambitions.

We are currently developing our joint Northern Devon Economic Strategy, which will be ready to publish early in 2024 once it has been evaluated by our Northern Devon Futures Partnership Board and adopted by our respective Councils. This is integral to the delivery of our respective Council's Strategic Plans, which are also being readied right now. Both Councils are well aligned in our ambitions for Northern Devon and these ambitions align with the strategic context of the Government's Levelling Up Missions.

Northern Devon is an ambitious area. Both Councils recognise the need to support our many and varied businesses, many of which are national and multinational, and to allow them to expand and grow. We also recognise the importance of Barnstaple as the Sub-regional centre and the positive impact that a vibrant Barnstaple has on both authority areas and we recognise the need to protect and enhance that position for the benefit of all of our communities. To do that, Barnstaple needs to grow and develop and some barriers to that growth need to be addressed

In addition, our unique location in Northern Devon with the Celtic Sea on our doorstep should allow us to take advantage of opportunities afforded by floating offshore wind and other technologies using green energy and will also present opportunities to develop the marine sector which is currently focussed on Harland and Wolf. The X-Links project, bringing clean solar power from Morocco is also intended to connect to the National Grid in our area and should itself bring opportunities to create and attract new industries and economic development within the area.

We also recognise that underpinning our growth ambitions is a need to address a fundamental housing issue within the area. Businesses report that a barrier to growth is the lack of suitable housing to accommodate employees and so current housing policies will need to be reviewed and perhaps refined in order to deliver more housing to accommodate that need whilst at the same time protecting the natural environment that makes North Devon and Torrige so attractive.

As well as the above, what sets our area apart from other districts or areas is the fact that Torridge District is one of the few authority areas to have been selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) with Government. The LUP is due to launch formally in March 2024 and The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox MP together with Torridge (Leader and Chief Executive) met with your departmental colleague The Rt Hon Jacob Young MP recently to progress the partnership and discuss the wider support of Government needed.

Torridge has been selected to form a Levelling Up Partnership because of the particular challenges around low wages, attainment, productivity and life expectancy and because both council areas comprise a single economic area, the partnership is likely to benefit the whole of the Northern Devon region. Both councils will work together to achieve the Levelling Up ambitions for the benefit of both districts but the reality is that projects intended to achieve this are likely to need policy support through a revised Local Plan.

Both Councils have concluded, that to achieve our ambitions, some of which are set out above, we need a new Local Plan for Northern Devon. These decisions have not been reached without careful consideration. We have recently completed the 5 year- review of our current plan and concluded that in the context of national planning policy it is fit for its "**current**" purpose of determining planning applications, but we recognise that to deliver the future economic and social benefits for our residents and communities, changes will need to be made to the Plan.

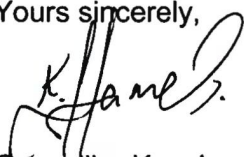
It is for the overwhelming reasons set out above that we seek your support to facilitate our Councils' vision and purpose to commence preparation of our new Joint Local Plan at the earliest opportunity.

We have been following closely the progress of the now Levelling and Regeneration Act 2023 and the emerging National Planning and Local Plan making reforms and understand that there are likely to be opportunities for some Councils to pilot the new systems being implemented. We see a speedy preparation of our new Local Plan as essential to delivering the ambitions set out above, which in turn will support the Levelling Up Partnership, and so would very much like to support the Government and be part of that pilot.

We would add that both councils have a long and strong history of working together on strategies including the existing Local Plan and both councils were emphatic that the new Local Plan should also be prepared jointly. If there is an opportunity to pilot the new arrangements, doing so in connection with a joint Local Plan would seem to us to give government an ideal opportunity to really test the new processes.

If there is an opportunity in your diary to meet with you to share and discuss this further we would very much like to take it.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Ken James
Leader Torridge District Council



Councillor Ian Roome
Leader North Devon Council

Cc - The Rt Hon Jacob Young MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Cc - The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Cox MP
Cc - The Rt Hon Selaine Saxby MP