

CHAPTER 20. HOUSING AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Vision for housing and community facilities

A housing stock providing a range of accommodation types to meet the needs of all sections of a thriving, working local community in a way that is compatible with the conservation of the landscape and natural resources. Thriving towns and villages that are able to provide a reasonable and affordable range of services and facilities so residents are not disadvantaged as a result of living in a remote rural area.

Objectives and Indicators

Objectives relate to the Exmoor National Park Management Plan
Indicators may be shared with those from other plans or organisations

LP - Exmoor National Park Local Plan

BVPP – Exmoor National Park Best Value Performance Plan

AC – Audit Commission

CA – Countryside Agency indicators used in their ‘State of the Countryside Reports’

RWP – The Government’s Rural White Paper ‘Our Countryside’

NPA – ‘Headline’ indicators developed by the National Park Authorities’ Data Working Group

RO – Indicators developed for the South West’s Regional Observatory

Objective 20/1

To ensure that all new-build housing in the National Park meets an identified local need.

Indicators:

Proportion of housing that is meeting local needs criteria; affordable housing provision by type and size of dwellings

Objective 20/3

To support the provision and retention of community facilities and services that are reasonably accessible and affordable to Exmoor's residents by developing and maintaining strong partnership programmes and through a supportive planning framework.

Indicators:

Distance of households from key services (AC); numbers of second, holiday and empty homes at a parish level; creation and loss of community services and facilities

Objective 20/4

To encourage and support local people to identify and increase awareness of local needs to support the development of local initiatives.

Indicators:

Numbers of meeting places, voluntary and cultural activities (AC) and contested parish elections (in four categories: vibrant, active, barely active and sleeping)

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HOW IS THE POPULATION OF EXMOOR CHANGING?

Current situation:

Exmoor has a relatively low density of population.

Trends:

The total population of Exmoor is slowly increasing.

There is a migration of people towards the West Country and to Exmoor

Population affects National Park purposes in that it is one of the factors which puts pressures on the landscape and in turn influences the quality of experience of visitors and the well-being of the local community. Between 1994 and 1999 the population of the United Kingdom rose by about 3 million. During the same period the population of the West Country rose by about 600,000 - much faster than the national rate of increase. Devon is the third fastest growing county in England. Population in the north of England and Scotland is declining and it is increasing generally from the Midlands southwards. In the West Country death rates are greater than birth rates and the increase in population is mainly through migration.

- *During the 1990s the population of Somerset grew by 5% and this was almost all accountable to net inward migration from other parts of the country. In West Somerset between 1993 and 1999 the existing population decreased by 3.8% whilst there was a 7.6% addition to the population through immigration. Source: Office for National Statistics*
- *In 1991 10.8% of families in North Devon and 10.3% in West Somerset had recently moved into the area, compared with a national average of 8.8%, indicating changes equivalent to a turnover of the entire populations of the districts every ten years. Source: National Census*

A large proportion of the incomers were aged over 45 and this is resulting in a higher than average proportion of people over retirement age living in the area, particularly in West Somerset, which has the fourth largest proportion of persons over retirement age of district and unitary authorities in the UK. The proportion of employment in nursing and residential homes is much higher here than the national average. Correspondingly, the only age group where there has been a reduction is the 'student' group of 15-24 years. West Somerset also has a much lower proportion of persons in the 20-30 age group than the National average. This reflects the lack of higher education facilities in the area and a lack of suitable job opportunities.

- *In North Devon there is a prediction of a 5.5% increase in population between 2001 and 2011 but this incorporates a 32.3% rise in the over 60s and a 4.7% decrease in the under 19s. Source: Office for National Statistics, Registrar General population projections*
- *Between 1992 and 2000 30% of households moving into property on Exmoor were retired. A further 9% included people both economically active and retired. 55% considered the environment to be one of the main reasons for moving. Source: Exmoor National Park Authority Residential Occupancy Survey*

The population density of Exmoor is low but appears to be increasing

The population density is low in some parts of Exmoor but not especially low for a rural area, apart from Exmoor parish, which must rank among the lowest densities of population in England. West Somerset is the second least densely populated district in the region. It must be remembered that most of England's population lives in towns and it is difficult to compare Exmoor with larger areas containing towns and cities.

- *In 1991 there were 0.15 persons per hectare on Exmoor compared with 1.51 persons per hectare for Devon and 1.3 persons per hectare in Somerset*
- *Most (65%) of Exmoor's parishes have below 500 population. However, this is below average for the West Country, where 84% of parishes are under 500 population. All of Exmoor's parishes are below 2000 population with the exception of Minehead, little of which is within the National Park.*

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The population density has been higher in the past, particularly in the mid 19th century, when there were more and larger households, but it would be difficult to produce accurate figures. Rural population is generally on the increase again and growing faster than urban populations. In the West Country the rural population grew by 13% between 1984 and 1998, compared with a 6% rise for the urban population.

It is difficult to measure population figures accurately for Exmoor as figures are grouped by parish and the National Park boundary does not follow parish boundaries. Also there is quite a difference between those actually resident on census night and those normally resident.

- *The first census since Exmoor became a National Park was in 1961, when the population was estimated at 11,570. An estimate of 11,700 had been made for 1951. In 1971 this appeared to have dropped to 9,455. However, in 1951 and 1961 it was assumed that the percentage of a parish's population within the Park was the same as the percentage of its land within the National Park. This led to a considerable overestimate as most of the main settlements of parishes straddling the boundary are outside of the National Park. In the same way the Sandford Report gave populations of the National Park as 13,400 in 1951, increasing to 14,400 in 1971. A more realistic assessment of the 1971 population was 10,491 by Woodruffe and 10,458 by the Countryside Commission using digitised mapping under the LINMAP system. An estimate of 9,994 for 1981 seems low in comparison. **Source: Population Changes in National Parks, BJ Woodruffe).***
- *Since 1981 population estimates for Exmoor have been reliably accurate. The normally resident population was 10,645 in 1991 and 10,873 in 2001, showing an increase of about 0.2% per annum. **Source: Exmoor National Park Census Monitor***

Methods of estimation have continually been refined, so it is difficult to assess trends. One can only say that the population of the National Park appears to have declined between 1951 and 1971 but since then it has been steadily increasing with considerable variation between parishes.

- *There was a steady decrease in population in private households from 10,731 in 1951 to 9296 in 1971. The decrease was mainly in parishes wholly within the National Park, with the fringe parishes increasing in population. The number of households generally increased during that time and the depopulation was attributed to the decreasing size of the average household. Both the increase in population on the fringes and decreasing size of household were attributed to an influx of retired people. The number of households within the National Park in 1971 was estimated at 3,477. **Source: Population Changes in National Parks, BJ Woodruffe***

Despite a high level of immigration from outside the region, there is still a low proportion of ethnic minority groups within the Exmoor population

The National Census has only recently started asking questions about people's backgrounds and questions have changed, so it is difficult to assess trends. However, the largely rural nature of the area and the fact that in Britain most persons from ethnic minorities live in cities means that there is a relatively low proportion of such persons on Exmoor.

- *In 1981 3.4% of Exmoor residents were born outside of the UK and 1.0% of the population lived in households headed by someone born in the Commonwealth. In 1991 0.35% of the Exmoor population was from non-white ethnic groups. Somerset as a whole has about 0.5% of persons from ethnic minorities within its population. The national average is 5.5%. **Source: National Census***

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HOW DO HOUSE PRICES ON EXMOOR COMPARE WITH ELSEWHERE?

Current situation:

House prices on Exmoor are relatively high

Trends:



House prices are increasing significantly beyond the regional and national average.

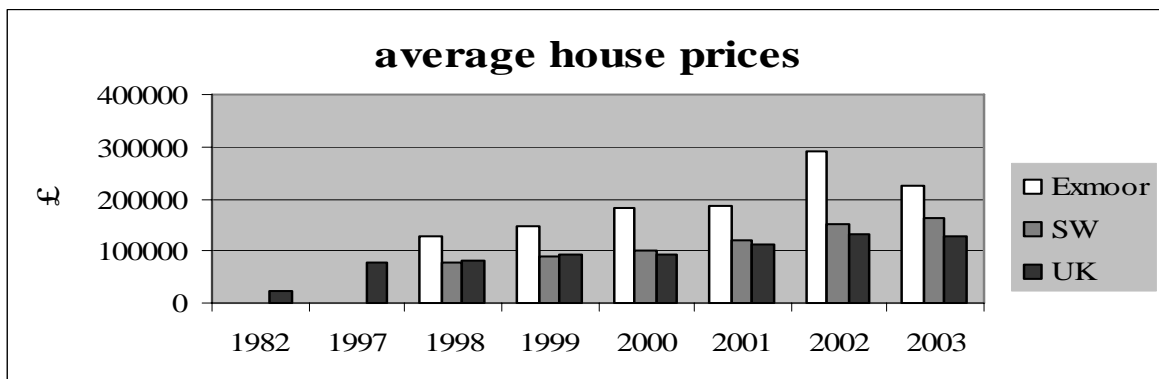
House prices on Exmoor are now higher than in London

House prices vary considerably throughout the United Kingdom, with prices generally increasing from the lowest in north east England to the highest in London. All house prices are rising steeply and those in the South West have risen by 83% between 1992 and 2002, more than anywhere except the South East. Within the same regions, house prices in rural wards are generally higher than those in urban wards.

- In 1999 the average house price in urban wards in the West Country was £79,132 but in rural wards it was £95,478. Source: Countryside Agency, The State of the Countryside 2001*

For many years prices in London and the South East were higher than those on Exmoor and it appeared that migration from south east to south west was pushing up house prices locally. There is still considerable migration to the West Country but it would appear that house prices now cannot account for migration to Exmoor and that quality of life is likely to be the main factor. In 2003 Exmoor house prices fell slightly below those of Greater London but were still well above the national and regional average, whilst West Country prices continued to grow more rapidly than those of other regions.

- In 1999 prices in Greater London were 37% higher and in the South East 27% higher on average than those in the South West. However, at the same time prices on Exmoor were 3% higher than those in Greater London. Source: Countryside Agency, The State of the Countryside 2001; ENPA house price survey*



Many people employed locally cannot afford houses on Exmoor

An indicator for housing deprivation has been calculated based on the proportion of the population earning enough to

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purchase an average cost house in their area. This has been calculated for unitary authority areas but not for Exmoor. Generally rural areas are more deprived than urban areas in this respect in that house prices are high and wages low. Housing need is average on Exmoor compared with the region as a whole. However, on Exmoor the proportion does vary from ward to ward.

In comparison with the remainder of the West Country, North Devon and West Somerset Districts are above average in their housing deprivation but the most disadvantaged districts are the rural districts in the east of the region, where house prices are generally highest. Exmoor does, however, have exceptionally high house prices which are above those for the remainder of the two local Districts. Also, within Somerset, West Somerset has the highest index of affordability (number of times the average income an average property costs). In 2000 the average terraced property cost 4.3 times the average income, compared with 3.5 times for Somerset as a whole.

Potential homes for local people are being bought by people from outside the area, some for second or holiday homes.

By 1998, the percentage growth in housing was greater in the South West than any other region. Part of this growth is because the Region has the highest proportion of the total number of second homes in the UK (Countryside Agency, 2000). This is not a problem confined to remote rural areas, however, and nationally the greatest concentrations of second homes are in city centres and coastal resorts. In recent years more new homes on Exmoor have been bought by persons from outside the region than by local people. However, forthcoming planning policy will restrict new housing development to that which satisfies a local need.

- *Between 1992 and 2000, 11% of occupants of new houses on Exmoor moved from within the National Park; 27% came from surrounding areas; 8% from elsewhere in South West; 27% from the South East; 27% from elsewhere in UK. The larger, more expensive houses generally went to people from further away. Source: ENPA Survey of new residential properties (1992 – 2000)*
- *In 1991 West Somerset was ranked 23rd amongst 366 districts in England and Wales for its percentage of second homes, with 8.9% against the national average of 5.5%. Source: National Census*

In recent years nearly a quarter of new homes on Exmoor have become used as second homes. Less than half have been lived in by persons working in the area.

- *In 1991 13% of housing stock was in second or holiday homes, rising to 30% in Brendon and 25% in Exton. The overall percentage was reduced to 10% in 2001. 23% of new properties built between 1992 and 2000 were being used as second or holiday homes; 37% of their occupiers were economically active - 30% retired and 9% with both economically active and retired. Source: National Census; ENPA Survey of new residential properties (1992 – 2000)*
- *In 2006 it was estimated that of the 77 residential properties in Lynmouth 43(56%) were holiday lets or second homes. Source: Local Community Survey*

Of those people moving to Exmoor in recent years, only a third has come for employment reasons.

- *Between 1992 and 2000, of those people moving to Exmoor, 54% came for the good environment; 34% for employment and 34% to retire. Source: ENPA Survey of new residential properties (1992 – 2000)*

The proportion of properties to rent is declining.

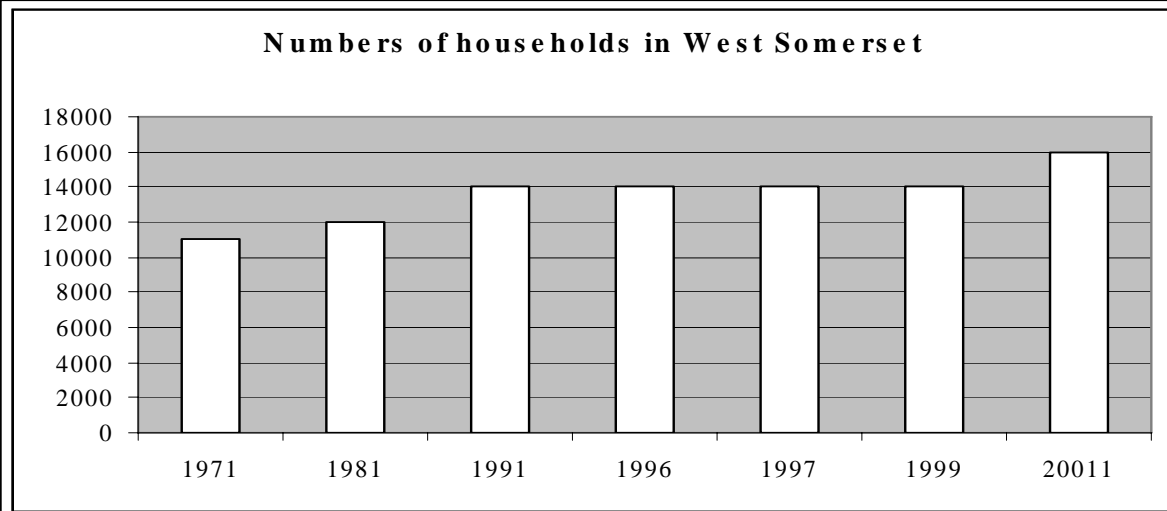
A consequence of the buoyant housing market on Exmoor is the changing tenure of properties. There is a lack of rented property as council houses and private rented properties have been sold. This increases the problems of local people on low incomes in finding accommodation in the area.

- *In 1971 49.6% of properties on Exmoor were owner occupied.. This had risen to 58.6% by 1981, 66% by 1991 and 68.3% by 2001. In 2001 46.04% of all properties on Exmoor were owned outright by the occupiers without loans. Source: National Census*
- *In 1981 16.1% of properties on Exmoor were owned by local authorities. By 1991 this had reduced to 11% and by 2001 to 1.14%. Now 11.66% of rented accommodation, apart from holiday lets, belongs to housing associations, 11.4% to private landlords and 7.54% is rented from others. Source: National Census*

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The demand for housing is also being fuelled by social changes such as smaller households.

In addition to population growth, the size of the average household in the region has decreased from 2.6 people in 1981 to 2.34 by 1998. Over a quarter of houses in the South West are occupied by only 1 person. Consequently, the number of households in the region is expected to increase by almost a quarter between 1991 and 2021.



Exmoor has a relatively high proportion of households containing one pensioner living on their own. There is concern that those coming to the area to retire are increasing demand for health and social services and reducing the viability of other community facilities such as schools and sports clubs. However, in 2000 only 1% of new households on Exmoor contained persons with long term illnesses. About a fifth of the region's population was at pension age or over in 1998 (nearly a third in West Somerset). Although this proportion is decreasing, it is the highest in the country and amongst the highest in Europe.

ARE EXMOOR PEOPLE DISADVANTAGED IN TERMS OF THE SERVICES AVAILABLE LOCALLY?

Current situation:

A moderate proportion of Exmoor's population is disadvantaged by distance from key services

Trends:



There is a continuing decline in certain services but an increase in others, particularly those for tourists

Exmoor is severely disadvantaged in terms of distance from some services although there is great variation within the area and in terms of services per head of population it is not as disadvantaged as many other areas.

There is a close correlation between the distance from towns and distance from services. Within the West Country Exmoor is part of the largest block of the most isolated wards. This includes mid and west Devon, north Dartmoor

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and east Cornwall. Exmoor's main settlements such as Lynton and Lynmouth, Dulverton and Porlock have some facilities and wards in those areas are not the most remote but because of the size of the wards, there is still a large percentage of people within them several miles from services such as a post office, bank, school or doctor's.

Generally, there is a close connection between the size of a settlement and the services it provides. The lack of services on Exmoor is mostly related to the small size of settlements. However, distance from large centres of population can be an asset in retaining services. If a parish is close to a large supermarket it may well lose its village shop and nationwide many of the parishes most deprived of services are those close to urban areas. Exmoor is relatively well off for village shops compared with England as a whole, but this may reflect tourist spending as well as distance from urban areas.

In terms of health services, people in the centre of Exmoor are as far from such services as anywhere in the region. Coastal parts of the area are relatively well supplied with such services, where the need appears to be greatest. The need of people in the centre of Exmoor in terms of those with disablement allowance, incapacity benefit or long term illness seems to be relatively low. Generally in the West Country this need seems to increase from east to west yet central Exmoor stands out as the main area of low need west of Taunton.

The West Country generally has fewer local services than rural England as a whole. Exmoor reflects the region as a whole but has some areas which are particularly sparsely populated, resulting in an uneven distribution of services. Amongst local wards Exmoor and Haddon rank within the top ten most deprived wards in England for access to services whereas Minehead North is amongst the least deprived. Distribution of some services is generally lower than average, particularly of post offices, meeting places and schools. Surprisingly, however, Exmoor is better served by shops, banks, bus services and petrol stations than average for the region.

Proportion of parishes without basic services, 2002:

| SERVICE | ENGLAND | WEST COUNTRY | EXMOOR |
|--------------------------|---------|--------------|--------|
| daily bus service | 64% | 67% | 51% |
| local doctor | 86% | 86% | 86% |
| local post office | 46% | 44% | 51% |
| pub | 25% | 26% | 23% |
| school | 48% | 46% | 67% |
| shop | 71% | 72% | 40% |
| village hall | 15% | 11% | 21% |
| bank or building society | 91% | 90% | 84% |
| petrol station | 81% | 79% | 63% |

- In 1983 the Exmoor Association of Parish Councils and Meetings undertook a survey of parishes within or partly within the National Park with a grant from the NPA. It looked at changes in services over the previous decade. It showed a decrease in some services (post office/store -6.7%; grocery -8.3%; butchers -22%; garage -12%) but an increase in others, particularly those for tourists (bakers +11%; mobile shops +61%; public call box +2.4%; public toilets +44%; public car parks +3%).*

Various surveys of facilities have been undertaken since the 1950s. The most consistent result has been the decline in village stores. In 1950 85% of Exmoor parishes had a post office/store. In 1973 it was 73% and 51% in 2002. Although the decline has progressed at the same rate throughout the region, a lower percentage of West Somerset parishes now have shops than Somerset as a whole. Surprisingly, although there had been a great increase in mobile shop services, they tended not to serve the parishes without shops. In recent years there appears to have been a decline in mobile services, although supermarkets are now beginning to offer deliveries.

Actions

Some of these actions are objectives and indicators from the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Objective 20/2

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To develop an up-to-date understanding of the housing needs of local people.

Action 20/1

Develop a database of residential planning permissions

Action 20/2

Monitor housing land availability and the supply of affordable housing

Action 20/3

Monitor house prices, rents and incomes

Action 20/4

Monitor the occupancy of new housing

Action 20/5

Survey housing needs at parish level

Action 20/6

Monitor second and holiday homes

Action 20/7

Make appraisals of local needs and monitor the availability of key local services

Action 20/8

Monitor change of use of business premises

NB The information contained in this report is based upon the best information available at the time. Although every effort has been made to confirm its accuracy and ensure that it has been used in the proper context, Exmoor National Park Authority cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information.