



# South Molton Town Study

Core Strategy Evidence

October 2011



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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This Town Study brings together a wide range of existing information, evidence and statistics relevant to South Molton in order to identify the issues and opportunities facing the town over the next 20 years. It will help to inform the vision, strategy and proposals for the town that will be incorporated within the Joint North Devon and Torridge Core Strategy being prepared for the period up to 2031.
- 1.2 This document provides an overview of the key characteristics that contribute to the form and function of South Molton. It analyses key issues, opportunities and constraints that could impact on the delivery of future sustainable growth for the town and creates an understanding of what needs further investigation. A thorough examination of such matters will enable informed decisions on how best to accommodate and deliver the town's future needs.
- 1.3 One purpose of this town study is to support community focused consultation to inform the Joint North Devon and Torridge Core Strategy, which will be an important document in guiding the location, form and scale of development required to achieve sustainable growth for the town that meets the area's long term needs. It is essential that local aspirations are reflected through the Core Strategy's vision and objectives. Through undertaking additional town focused consultation it is anticipated that relevant and supported visions can be established for the towns of northern Devon.
- 1.4 For the purposes of this study, South Molton is defined by the Town Council boundary.

## **2. Overview**

- 2.1 South Molton is a market town located to the south of the A361, midway between Barnstaple and Tiverton and to the south west of Exmoor. The town is located about 14 kilometres (9 miles) south east of Barnstaple, accessed along the A361 leading towards Tiverton and the M5.
- 2.2 South Molton is a relatively small town but serves an extensive, inland, predominantly agricultural, rural area. The town has expanded rapidly over recent years and is an agricultural centre. Pathfields Business Park to the north of the town has expanded as a vibrant economic centre.

### 2.3 **Population – ‘increasing more quickly than other North Devon towns’**

- 2.3.1 South Molton has grown substantially over the last ten years. The parish population has increased by over 17% over the period 2001 to 2010, providing an annualised increase of above 80 people per year. This followed a period of slower net growth (6%) between 1991 and 2001.
- 2.3.2 From 2001 to 2010 the population of South Molton increased by 721 people. The 17.6% rate of population increase in the town was substantially higher than that experienced in other North Devon towns (Barnstaple, Braunton, Ilfracombe, Fremington/Yelland), across the district as a whole and across Devon. The variance in population growth across the geographic areas is shown in Table 1.
- 2.3.3 Age distribution within the South Molton population is more extreme than that of the wider areas (see Table 1) with relatively high proportions aged under 19 years and over 80 years old, and a lower proportion aged 40-79 years compared to the District and Devon. The high proportion of the population at the extreme age ranges is likely to have implications for care and service delivery, as well as availability of future labour force.
- 2.3.4 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment for the Northern Peninsula (2008) indicated net in-migration of 4,400 people to North Devon between 2001 and 2006, with the largest gains for the 45 to 64 years age bracket. Other large gains aged 25 to 44 years and 0 to 15 years are indicative of inward movement of families. Overall in-migration indicates equity-cushioned older pre-pensioner households and households with dependent children, especially from London, the South East and the West Midlands. In the reverse direction, there is a steady loss of younger and more independent households, the reasons for which remain largely speculative, but which will include a combination of movement for education, employment and access to affordable housing.
- 2.3.5 The increasing age of the area’s population is reflective of a national trend. In 2008, 16% of the population of England was estimated to be aged 65 and over, with the South West region estimated to have the highest percentage of older persons (19%). By 2033<sup>1</sup>, over a quarter of the population of the South West is projected to be aged 65 and over, a level already being approached in South Molton and across North Devon.

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<sup>1</sup> Sub national Population Projections, ONS (May 2010):

Table 1: Population

				Devon (including Plymouth & Torbay)
2001	4,098	51,980	89,097	1,136,500
2010	4,819	53,978	92,894	1,179,354
Change	721	1,998	3,797	42,854
% change	17.6%	3.8%	4.3%	3.7%
0 -19	23.5%	23.2%	22.6%	21.5%
20-39	20.5%	20.8%	19.4%	23.9%
40-59	25.8%	27.0%	27.6%	27.2%
60-79	21.9%	22.6%	24.0%	21.4%
80+	8.3%	6.4%	6.4%	6.0%

Source: 2001 Census, FSHA data and Devon County Town Profiles<sup>3</sup>

## 2.4 Income – ‘lower than across much of North Devon’

2.4.1 Median household income in North Devon of £24,970 (2008) is the second lowest for any district in Devon (after Torridge district). The North Devon median household income is £1,142 (7.5%) below the Devon average. South Molton average household income is £23,172, approximately 7% below the district average figure (Table 2).

Table 2: Average Incomes

	Total	Household income average (median)
North Devon	42,770	£24,970
Devon County (excluding Plymouth and Torbay)	331,804	£26,112
South Molton	2,201	£23,172

Source: CACI and Paycheck data provided by CACI (2008)

<sup>2</sup> Including the parts of North Devon within Exmoor National Park

<sup>3</sup> Devon County Council Devon Facts and Figures: <https://www.devon.gov.uk/factsandfigures/>

## 2.5 Benefits – ‘a high level of dependency on benefits for older age groups’

2.5.1 The types of benefits identified in Table 3 indicate a mixed picture for South Molton compared to North Devon or Devon as a whole. South Molton is above local and national averages for the proportion of over 65s claiming attendance allowance and over 60s claiming pension credit, which may reflect the high proportion of the population aged over 80. Conversely, the proportion of 16 – 64 year olds claiming job seekers allowance (1.7%) is lower than equivalent local and national figures.

2.5.2 Claimants of disability living allowance reflect wider District and Devon figures, but remain below national averages. The proportion of income support claimants is also higher than North Devon and Devon, but below national figures. Overall, the figures in Table 3 demonstrate a higher level of dependency for elderly age groups benefits within the town, but less so for younger age groups.

Table 3: Benefits

	South	North		National
16 – 59 year olds claiming income support	4.9%	4.5%	3.9%	5.6%
16 – 64 year olds claiming job seekers allowance	1.7%	2.1%	2.0%	3.7%
Total population claiming disability living allowance	4.2%	4.3%	4.2%	5.2%
65 and older claiming attendance allowance	21.8%	17.3%	17.3%	18.2%
60 and older claiming pension credit	20.8%	17.7%	15.3%	20.6%

Source: Devon Town Profiles 2010 – Department for Work & Pensions

## 2.6 Employment – ‘education, catering and real estate are significant sectors’

2.6.1 A large percentage of the work force is involved in education (25.2%), well above the equivalent figures for North Devon (9.9%) and Devon (9.4%). There is also a relatively high proportion employed in hotels and restaurants (10.8%), although below the figure for North Devon (12.8%), which reflects the importance of tourism to the local economy. Also, a large proportion of South Molton’s work force is involved with land based industries such as real estate (19.1%) and mining and quarrying (0.6%), both above national and local figures, with agriculture and forestry (1.3%) above the national average but below figures for North Devon (1.9%) and Devon (2.2%).

2.6.2 In contrast, South Molton has a much lower proportion of its workforce involved in manufacturing (9.5%), wholesale and retail (13.3%), financial services (0%), health and social work (5.4%) and public administration (1.4%), which are well below the equivalent figures for North Devon, Devon and nationally as set out in Table 4. The proportion working in financial services will have increased since 2007 with Davisons relocating to Pathfields.

Table 4: Employment Sectors

Agriculture & forestry	1.3%	1.9%	2.2%	1.0%
Fishing	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Mining & quarrying	0.6%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Manufacturing	9.5%	13.9%	9.6%	10.2%
Gas & water	0.0%	0.3%	0.8%	0.4%
Construction	5.5%	4.6%	5.7%	4.8%
Wholesale & retail trade	13.3%	19.9%	18.2%	16.6%
Hotels & restaurants	10.8%	12.8%	8.9%	6.8%
Transport, storage & communication	4.2%	3.4%	6.0%	5.8%
Financial services	0.0%	0.9%	1.6%	4.0%
Real estate & business activities	19.1%	9.7%	12.4%	18.0%
Public administration & defence	1.4%	4.9%	6.4%	5.4%
Education	25.2%	9.9%	9.4%	9.3%
Health & social work	5.4%	13.7%	13.4%	12.3%
Other community services	3.5%	3.9%	5.0%	5.3%

Source: Devon Town Profiles 2010 – Office for National Statistics

## 2.7 Unemployment – ‘slightly below the average for North Devon’

2.7.1 In 2011, unemployment as a percentage of the work force is below that of the District but slightly above that of the County (Table 5).

Table 5: Unemployment Claimants

							Devon		
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
Number unemployed	n/a	43	61	1,635	1,075	1,305	8,581	6,138	10,159
% of working age (16 – 64) population	n/a	1.7%	2.3%	3.1%	1.9%	2.4%	2%	1.4%	2.2%

Source: NOMIS: Official labour market statistics (February 2011)

## 2.8 House Prices – ‘lower than average across North Devon but increasing more quickly’

2.8.1 All types of average house prices are substantially below those for North Devon and Devon, apart from semi-detached houses, which are between the district and county average (Table 6). Average prices for flats are almost half of those elsewhere in the district. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment for the Northern Peninsula<sup>4</sup> identifies South Molton within the Market Town sub-market area, which has accessible locations offering less expensive homes. It is at the interface between the Tav and Torridge, Exmoor and Deep Rural sub-market areas, and could constitute the focus for local development.

Table 6: Average House Prices

	South Molton	North Devon	Devon
Overall	165,814	209,460	223,636
Detached	235,310	285,301	310,899
Semi- detached	193,071	187,493	197,547
Terrace	130,689	158,442	172,313
Flat / maisonette	83,167	164,651	160,202

Source: Devon Town Profiles 2010 – Land Registry

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/index/lqcl\\_environment/lqcl\\_planning/nonlqcl\\_planning\\_policy.htm](http://www.northdevon.gov.uk/index/lqcl_environment/lqcl_planning/nonlqcl_planning_policy.htm)

2.8.2 Average house prices in South Molton (Table 7) increased at a rate higher than that experienced across Devon and nationally over the period 2001-2009. In 2009 the average property price in South Molton was £217,934, which exceeded the North Devon average price (£214,125) by about 1.8%.

Table 7: Average House Prices by Year

	Average Prices (£) 2001	Average Prices (£) 2003	Average Prices (£) 2005	Average Prices (£) 2007	Average Prices (£) 2009	% increase 2001 / 2009
South Molton	102,012	148,079	207,563	253,887	217,934	102%
Devon	112,813	165,264	208,323	241,523	223,636	98%
England & Wales	92,183	129,632	157,880	179,905	157,033	70%

Source: Devon Town Profiles 2010 – Land Registry

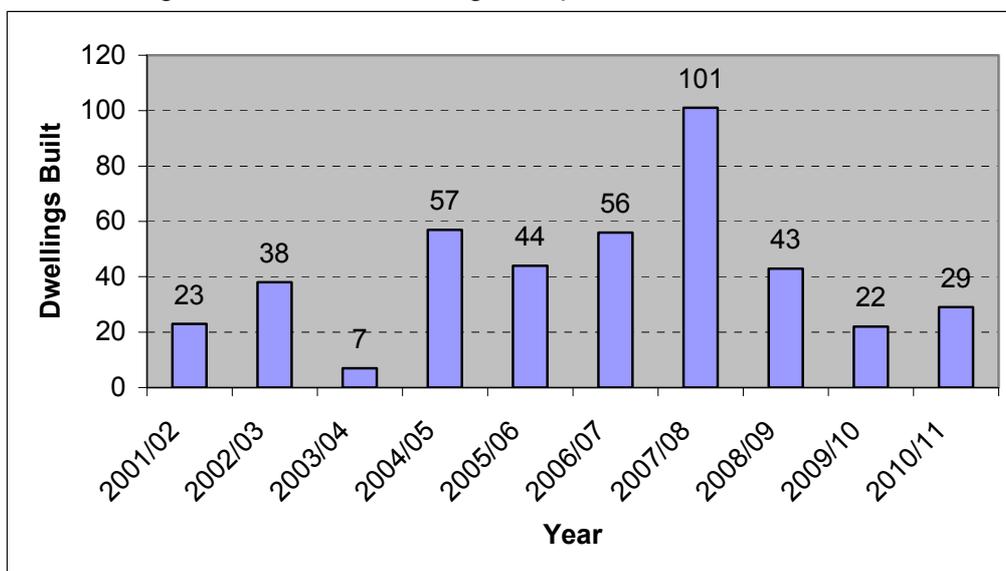
2.8.3 North Devon is one of the least affordable areas to buy housing in the South West. ‘Home Truths’ (2011) prepared by the National Housing Federation shows a ratio of mean house prices to median income<sup>5</sup> of 14.8, the fourth highest for any District in the South West region. Whilst other districts have higher house prices, North Devon has one of the lowest average incomes in the country (see section 2.4). This affordability ratio exceeds those for the South West region (11.6) and England (11.2).

## 2.9 Housing Supply – ‘modest supply of deliverable housing commitments’

2.9.1 A total of 420 dwellings were completed for the period 2001 to 2011, and 542 for the period 1995 to 2011. Figure 1 shows that in 2007/08 there was a spike in housing, while dips occurred in 2003/04 and 2009/2010. These fluctuations could partly be explained by local circumstances including the completion of key sites.

<sup>5</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2010

Figure 1: Annual Housing Completions in South Molton



Source: NDC Annual Housing Monitoring

2.9.2 Table 8 provides a summary of housing supply for South Molton on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. The number of dwellings approved but not implemented is modest (107). However, there is also a substantial allocated site without planning permission for 150 units at Gullacombe (between Station Road and Parsonage Lane). Other allocated sites have been discounted where land is no longer deemed available or alternative uses have been approved.

Table 8: Housing Supply

	No. of Units
Units Under Construction	29
Units on Sites Subject to Implementation	2
Unimplemented Planning Permissions on sites of 1 – 9 dwellings	41
Unimplemented Planning Permissions on sites of 10+ dwellings	35
Units on sites approved subject to s106 agreement	18
Units on sites Allocated Without Consent	150
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>275</b>

Source: NDC Annual Housing Monitoring

2.9.3 In 2001, the majority (approximately 85%) of existing dwellings in North Devon were houses or bungalows, with 14% flats (either purpose built or converted). Within South Molton, there were approximately 89.5% houses and 10.3% flats, the remainder being mobile homes. The proportion of flats has increased over the last decade as a result of pressures to reuse existing building stock and to maximise density of new development. The 2009 House Condition Survey indicates a North Devon figure of 16.5% flats.

## 2.10 Deprivation – ‘*moderate levels of deprivation for most measures*’

2.10.1 North Devon is ranked 146<sup>th</sup> from 326 Local Authorities in the English Indices of Deprivation (2010). At a local level North Devon is the second most deprived district area in Devon, narrowly better than Exeter City. Deprivation issues in North Devon relate to the barriers to presence of skills and training and the quality of the living environment (immediate home surroundings). With these measures of deprivation<sup>6</sup> the urban parts of the district generally experience higher than average levels of deprivation, whereas the rural areas score above average for most indicators. The exception is barriers to housing and services (physical and financial accessibility of housing and key local services) where urban areas score above average and rural areas generally score below average.

2.10.2 Indices of deprivation for South Molton<sup>7</sup> indicate moderate levels of deprivation. Across South Molton, there is above average deprivation in respect of: employment, income, health and disability, skills and training. It performs top quartile for crime scores according to recorded low crime rates and for barriers to housing and services (physical and financial accessibility of housing and key local services).

## 2.11 Health – ‘*incidence of long term illness reflects an older age profile*’

2.11.1 In 2001 92.0% of residents surveyed said they were in good or fairly good health, slightly above figures of 91.5% for the District and 91.4% for Devon (South Molton Devon Town Baseline Profile May 2006, extracted from Census). Approximately 21.3% of residents surveyed in the 2001 census said they had a limiting long-term illness compared to 17.8% for the District and 19% for Devon. In part this reflects the demographic profile of South Molton with a high proportion of over 80s, and the higher level of claimants of attendance allowance Table 3.

2.11.2 Life expectancy in South Molton is significantly below average for the district and Devon as a whole. In comparison, the highest life expectancy in Devon is at Ottery St. Mary (83.6 years), almost 5 years longer than that in South Molton. The life expectancy is also lower than the national average.

Table 9: Life Expectancy

Area	Female	Male	Total
South Molton	80.6	76.7	78.9
North Devon	82.5	77.8	80.2
Devon	83.0	78.9	81.0
United Kingdom	82.0	77.9	80.0

Source: <http://www.infopoint.devonpct.nhs.uk> ONS & Devon County Council

<sup>6</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government>

**2.12 Primary and Secondary Schools – ‘limited capacity in infants school for any future growth’**

2.12.1 There are three schools in South Molton, with the Infant’s School currently over capacity. However, there is spare capacity within the Church Junior School and Community College.

Table 10: School Numbers

	<b>Capacity</b>	<b>2009 Enrolled</b>	<b>2010 Enrolled</b>	<b>2011 Enrolled</b>
South Molton Infants School, North Road	119	118	136	129
South Molton United Church of England Junior School, North Street	179	146	153	145
South Molton Community College, Old Alswear Road	620	581	560	534

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables> & Devon County Council

**2.13 Environment – ‘attractive natural environment around the town’**

2.13.1 North Devon District forms part of the world class North Devon Biosphere Reserve designated by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), with South Molton located in the Transition Zone. There are no Local Nature Reserves at South Molton so Natural England’s Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANGSt) Plus Standard of 1 hectare/1000 population is not met, although there is public access to the community woodland, which could become a future Local Nature Reserve.

2.13.2 There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest or County Wildlife Sites around the town and the main areas of ecological interest are grouped around the River Mole and the smaller watercourses. Land north of the A361 and to the west of South Molton are included within the Woodland Strategic Nature Area as one of the best places in the South West for major habitat expansion for priority habitats.

**2.14 Open Space – ‘deficiencies in some types of open space’**

2.14.1 South Molton is well provided for with playing pitches but has inadequate provision of equipped play areas and informal public open spaces, although a new play park has recently been provided in Central Park (Table 11), especially on the western side of the town. The existing cemetery has limited capacity for future burials.

Table 11: Open Space

Informal Open Space	~	3.3	Yes
Equipped Play Areas	4	0.3	Yes
Sports Pitches	5	11.4	No
Allotments	1	0.75	No
Cemeteries / Churchyards	1	0.75	Yes
Community Parks	2	23.3	No
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>39.7</b>	

Source: North Devon Open Space Strategy

## **2.15 Heritage – ‘high quality protected historic environment’**

2.15.1 There are 89 listed buildings in South Molton parish, of which 4 are Grade II\* and 3 are Grade I listed. Most of these buildings are located within the designated conservation area, which covers 17 hectares. The Grade I listed buildings are the Parish Church, Guildhall and Cemetery Chapel. Castle Hill at Filleigh to the north west of South Molton is a Grade I Historic Park and Garden.

## **2.16 Landscape – ‘attractive rolling farmed landscape adjoining river Mole’**

2.16.1 Land to the north of the A361 is identified as an Area of Great Landscape Value. The special landscapes around the town contribute to the overall strategy in the Joint Landscape Character Assessment for North Devon & Torridge (2010) of protecting the special character, views and habitats. The landscapes applicable to the area are summarised below.

Table 12: Landscape Character Types

<p>1F Farmed Lowland Moorland and Culm Grassland</p>	<p>The high open tracts of Culm grassland and moors which sit on the poorly drained soils and sandstone ridges of the <i>Culm Measures</i> geological series;</p> <p>Special qualities are the distinctive culm grassland habitats and associated birdlife, traditional management regimes, small field patterns enclosed by thick Devon banks and surrounded by open grazing land, isolated farmsteads and high levels of tranquility and remoteness; &amp;</p> <p>The overall strategy is to protect the landscape’s traditional farming systems that are integral to the survival of rare Culm grassland habitats.</p>
<p>3A Upper Farmed Wooded Valley slopes</p>	<p>Upper catchments of the main river valleys, comprising a gently rolling pastoral landscape of fields bounded by thick Devon hedges;</p> <p>Special qualities are an open landscape with important vantage points and uninterrupted vistas, narrow sunken lanes and species-rich hedgebanks, copses and little or no light pollution resulting in starlit skies; &amp;</p> <p>The overall strategy is to protect the landscape’s strong rural character and historic sense of place and a rich mosaic of fields bounded by an intact network of species-rich Devon hedges.</p>
<p>3G River Valley Slopes and Combes</p>	<p>The steep wooded slopes enclosing the main river valleys including the Mole;</p> <p>Special qualities are broadleaved woodlands covering valley slopes, narrow green lanes and roadside hedges and a sense of peace and tranquility; &amp;</p> <p>The overall strategy is to protect and enhance the peaceful character of the valley slopes, fringed by well-managed woodlands and fields enclosed by an intact network of species-rich Devon banks.</p>

Source: Joint Landscape Character Assessment for North Devon & Torridge (2010)

## 2.17 Community Facilities – ‘a wide range of community facilities’

2.17.1 South Molton has a wide range of facilities commonly found in a market town / service centre (Table 13). There are a range of services and facilities that cater for the area. The location of some of these community facilities is shown on Map 1.

Table 13: Community Facilities

Facility	
Banks/Building Societies	4
Places of Worship	3
Community College	1
Community Hall	3
Dental Surgeries	2
Doctor Surgery	2
Hospital	1
Infant School	1
Junior School	1
Leisure Centre (swimming pool)	1
Library	1
Optician Practices	2
Pharmacy	2
Police Station	1
Post Office	2
Public Houses	5
Sport fields	5
Supermarkets	2
Vet	2

Source: DCC, NDC & South Molton Town Council

## 2.18 Transport – ‘poor links to strategic rail, cycle and footpath networks’

2.18.1 South Molton has good connectivity to the A361 towards Barnstaple, Tiverton and the M5, which provides the main approach to the town and Pathfields Business Park. The town is served by regular bus services to and from Barnstaple, with links to Witheridge, Tiverton and surrounding villages. Most operate relatively frequent services between Monday to Saturday, but offer fewer services in the evenings and on a Sunday.

2.18.2 North Devon's link to the national railway network is at Exeter, from Barnstaple along the Tarka Line through the Taw valley. Whilst this hourly service has recently experienced increased usage, South Molton remains relatively remote from the strategic rail network, mainly due to the very limited connectivity between Barnstaple bus station and the railway station. There are no public transport links to other stations along the Tarka Line, such as Kings Nympton, Portsmouth Arms or Umberleigh. There is no regular links to Tiverton Parkway railway station from either South Molton or Barnstaple other than by the private car.

2.18.3 There are no strategic cycle routes or long-distance footpaths passing through South Molton, although there are is a public right of way between South Molton and North Molton. Community engagement has previously identified the need for additional footpaths and bridleways around the town.

2.18.4 The Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 3 (2010) identifies South Molton as a Market Town. The strategy for these towns is to improve connectivity to the main urban areas, promote sustainable travel, improve the connectivity between different modes of transport and create opportunities for walking, cycling and outdoor leisure.

**2.19 Tourism – ‘a component of the town’s economy’**

2.19.1 Table 14 provides a snap shot of available self-catering, bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation in South Molton and in close proximity to the town. These figures are for those businesses registered with South Molton Tourist Information Centre, so are likely to underestimate overall tourist accommodation.

Table 14: Tourist Accommodation

Caravan &		Bed &	
4	20	16	4

Source: South Molton Tourist Information Centre

## 2.20 Summary of Issues

Table 15: Summary of Issues

<b>Population</b>	Substantial population growth
	Below average
	Higher level of dependency for elderly age groups than District & Devon
	Above average employment in education, land-based industries, hotels and restaurants
	Below unemployment levels of the District and Devon
	Below average crime rates compared to the District and Devon
	Below average house prices
	Steady housing growth with substantial potential housing supply
	Moderate levels of deprivation compared to the District and Devon
	Residents are generally in good health above the District average
	Both Infant and Junior Schools appear to be at or near capacity
<b>Community</b>	Good range of facilities but GP surgeries are over capacity
	Good public transport links to Barnstaple, Tiverton and surrounding villages
<b>Tourism</b>	An important part of the town's economy

### 3 Major Planning Applications

- 3.1 A summary of recently approved large-scale permissions is listed in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Planning Permissions

Reference			
2010	49860	Phase 3, Lime Court, Lime Way	Erection of one (B1) office building with car parking
2010	48593	Land adjacent to South Molton Hospital, between Widgery Drive and Raleigh Meadow	Erection of Care Home & formation of vehicular & pedestrian accesses
2010 2009 2008	49917 48289 47071	Plot A, Pathfields Business Park	Erection of six B1 (light industrial) units with road access, car parking & erection of commercial vehicle maintenance and car sales unit
2007 2006	45155 33426	Lime Field, Pathfields Industrial Estate	Erection of 11 industrial units
2007	44921	Site F, land adjacent to Hacche Lane, Pathfields Industrial Estate	Erection of 1 factory unit with associated car / lorry parking
2008	39727	Mole Valley Farmers Limited, Station Road	Outline application for demolition of existing buildings & erection of 35 dwellings

### 4 Size, Land Use and Character

- 4.1 South Molton is an historic market town situated on rolling hills to the west of the River Mole. Up to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it grew based on the wool trade and its livestock market, then did not grow until recently when it expanded as an administrative centre serving a large rural hinterland between Dartmoor and Exmoor. Its role as an agricultural centre remains important. The town centre is dominated by a large number of listed buildings.
- 4.2 Map 1 shows that South Molton is served by a number of bus routes, with some opportunities for walking and cycling around the town. Residential and administrative uses are dominant in the town, especially those associated with land-based employment.

## **5 Constraints**

### **5.1 Flooding**

- 5.1.1 Areas at risk of flooding (Environment Agency Flood Zones 2 and 3) are restricted to the River Mole on the eastern side of town. The town is well above this river apart from Mill-on-the-Mole Caravan Park.
- 5.1.2 The Environment Agency's North Devon Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009) identifies South Molton within Rural North Devon as an area of low to moderate flood risk where existing flood risk is generally being managed effectively.

### **5.2 Topography**

- 5.2.1 The town has been built on gently rolling hillsides, falling towards the valley of the River Mole to the east. There are east-west ridges to the south of the town and between South Molton and Pathfields Business Park.

### **5.3 Landscape**

- 5.3.1 As highlighted in section 2.16, land to the north of the A361 is within the Area of Great Landscape Value (see Map 2). Ridges to north and south of the town are more prominent in the landscape.

### **5.4 Biodiversity**

- 5.4.1 Section 2.13 indicates there are no sites designated for nature conservation around South Molton, although the community woodland needs to be maintained and enhanced as a key element in the green infrastructure network.

## **6 Relationship to Other Centres**

- 6.1 South Molton has strong links with surrounding towns and villages (including Bishops Nympton, Chulmleigh, Kings Nympton, North Molton and Witheridge) across a wide rural area, including the southern fringes of Exmoor National Park. It acts as a significant local service centre providing local shopping, education, healthcare, work, leisure and community facilities. For higher order services including comparison shopping, higher education and alternative work opportunities, residents travel to Barnstaple, Tiverton, Taunton or Exeter. Bus services to Barnstaple and Tiverton are regular during normal working hours.
- 6.2 The A361 between Barnstaple, Tiverton and the M5 passes to the north of South Molton and provides the main approach to the town and strategic access to Pathfields Business Park. Ilfracombe and the north coast are

accessed along the A399 via Brayford. The B3137 provides access to South Molton from Meshaw and Witheridge (to the south east), with the B3227 providing the main access from Chittlehampton and Umberleigh (to the west). North Molton (to the north) and George Nympton, Kings Nympton and Chulmleigh (to the south) are accessed along minor roads.

- 6.3 Figures from the 2001 Census show commuting rates between the main towns of North Devon and Torrridge. Almost 70% of the working population from South Molton work within the town, with a further 12% commuting to Barnstaple (including Roundswell). There are 7.6% commuting outside the district, with 1.4% commuting to Tiverton and almost 1% commuting to Exeter. Of the people working in South Molton, the majority (67%) live within the town.

Table 17: Commuting Patterns

South Molton	69.2%
Barnstaple (including Fremington and Roundswell)	12.3%
Braunton (including Wrafton/Chivenor)	0.7%
Ilfracombe (including Mullacott)	0.7%
Rural North Devon	9.5%
Outside North Devon	7.6%

Source: 2001 Census

## 7 Community

- 7.1 Update to the strategic action plan for South Molton town and surrounding parishes to the year 2023 – February 2011.
- 7.1.1 Molton Area 2000 published a strategic action plan in 2003, which was updated by South Molton Community Company in 2011. A snap shot of key issues identified by the local community are summarised in Table 18.

Table 18: Summary of the updated South Molton Strategic Action Plan

<p>Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New houses should not all be built by large developers. Some new houses should be locally designed and built. Self build and other hybrid schemes should be explored.</li> <li>• All new houses should have solar hot-water and district heating systems should be considered. The energy consumption of existing housing stock needs to be assessed and ways found to improve it.</li> <li>• Local people should have first priority for affordable / social housing.</li> <li>• Care homes and "independent living units" need to be part of the housing mix.</li> </ul>
<p>Infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The existing medical centre / surgery is inadequate and increasingly unacceptable. Centrality, parking and pedestrian and disabled access all need to be borne in mind in planning their replacement.</li> <li>• The Junior School needs replacing. A new school is best placed near the infant school with a possible additional primary nearer the community college.</li> <li>• Allotments and green spaces are a key concern. Sufficient growing land should either be provided within new developments or additional land allocated elsewhere. The provision of allotments to the west of the community woodlands would create a greenbelt of woodland, orchard and allotments.</li> <li>• Beech House represents a valued community resource as a day care centre; it is feared that the private sector might be less able to offer day and respite care.</li> <li>• A new Youth Resource Centre is a high priority.</li> <li>• User-friendly public toilets are a high priority.</li> <li>• There should be a minor accident unit at the hospital if the town grows as planned.</li> <li>• Space for future services at Pathfields such as a combined fire / ambulance station should be considered.</li> <li>• There is an opportunity for more community use of college facilities.</li> </ul>
<p>Economy and Employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is recognition and public support for the specialist niche of retail in South Molton along with the antique, health care services (main stream and complementary) sectors and the South Molton Recycling Centre. Local food could be a greater economic driver.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is overwhelming public support for moving the Livestock Market out of town: the development of an agri-centre at Pathfields is an important part of the development vision.</li> <li>• There is a strong sense that supermarkets which are too big, or to have two supermarkets in town, would have a strong negative impact on the individual retail shops and cafes. Parking is viewed as a major issue for the town compounded by supermarket developments.</li> <li>• There was much enthusiasm for the further development of Pathfields as an industrial / employment centre, both for local and national companies. Any development should not be of a type to rival or to detract from the centre of town.</li> <li>• Tourism is an important industry for the economy and also for employment. The re-housing and development of the TIC is important.</li> <li>• The potential of the Assembly Rooms / Pannier Market as an economic catalyst is not currently realised. There are suggestions for the development of the Pannier Market into specialist markets such as Hog Roasts, Fat Stock days, and themed events such as ones for French goods, arts and crafts events etc.</li> <li>• There is a perceived need for increased adult learning / training / education opportunities in town.</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bus services since the change of timetabling in 2008 are inadequate. This has become more relevant for villages in the light of local post office closures. Also, bus company services need to be co-ordinated e.g. First and Stagecoach arrive at the same time for Barnstaple leaving hour gaps between services. Co-ordination is also required between different modes of transport to produce an integrated transport plan for the area. Consideration needs to be given to a bus link to Tiverton Parkway, e.g. by altering bus route 155 to Exeter to take in train stations. An evening bus service to Barnstaple has been repeatedly requested. Bus policies at County level may need changing to achieve the changes required.</li> <li>• There is a shortage of footpaths and those that exist can become overgrown and unusable. There is a concern that pedestrian and cycling perspectives have not been given due weight in the design of the Central Development Area. There is a need to increase the number of multi-use paths for cyclists,</li> </ul>

	<p>horseriders, walkers and disabled, e.g. improve access from North Molton under the link road with lighting and a footbridge over river. Ensure paths link up and are not cut off by roads. Access to the River Mole is a high priority. Within town, pedestrian access along Old Alswear Road to the community college and the football fields is unsafe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buses should be adapted to be able to carry bikes.</li> <li>• A public transport hub with enhanced picking up / dropping off and waiting facilities needs to be incorporated into planning for the Central Development Area.</li> <li>• Learn from Torrington community transport forum that exists already. Consider different forms of advertising to promote schemes e.g. facebook, college radio, leaflets etc (see communication section).</li> <li>• A mini bus (possibly combined with a ‘Park and Ride’) would be valued to link up the wider local South Molton community, in particular Pathfields and the town centre.</li> <li>• A scooter to rent scheme offered for young people needs to be explored.</li> <li>• The existing lorry park in the Central Development Area needs relocation.</li> <li>• Parking poses serious and growing problems, particularly in some parts of the town (e.g. North Street and West Street, bus stop on corner of Poltimore Road) with enforcement issues needing resolution. Consider possibility of disabled parking in the square – or by reducing width of street by pedestrian crossing in East Street outside the Surgery. General review of parking in the town required.</li> <li>• Local car hire / swap / car club/ community bus / Park and Ride / car substitute arrangements need investigation. Need to publicise the Devon car share website and possibly hold meeting/events to arrange lifts in villages/towns to reduce concerns over personal safety issues. A number of different transport services in the area may be available e.g. DCC minibus hire outside school times, community transport etc but needs to be better publicised.</li> <li>• The A361 will need upgrading if the planned expansion goes ahead. It is already dangerous in many places.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and information exchange mechanisms need to be enhanced, including the</li> </ul>

	<p>development of a central website for the area, e.g. Town Council website. Facebook and other electronic forums represent effective and often preferred communication channels for the young, so should be formally supported. What is the potential for community radio?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community News Sheet is valued. The printed version of "Who's who" would still be welcome. Need to be a range of different formats of communication to suit different needs.</li> <li>• Better links need to be made with the Community College, the Pathfields Development, U3A, the Amory Centre, and the youth constituency and between parishes, including better publicity about what is available in the area. The use of the Amory Centre by non-funded groups is difficult due to the cost.</li> <li>• A Youth Council with representation on the town council is supported. Need to explore ways in which greater youth involvement is encouraged.</li> </ul>
<p>Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beech House represents a valued community resource as a day care centre; it is to be privatised which will lead to 6 redundancies and day and respite care may be lost if uneconomic. Facilities for the elderly need review.</li> <li>• The Job Centre outreach has gone which is of great detriment.</li> <li>• The ongoing need for a Youth Resource Centre remains great.</li> <li>• Benefit forms are too complicated and more support is needed to help claimants. Age Concern will help the elderly but again needs publicity.</li> <li>• More entertainment (e.g. for plays), leisure, sport, growing and open space needed.</li> <li>• Inadequate public conveniences are an ongoing issue.</li> <li>• There are a range of services available by appointment at the Amory Centre e.g. CAB and BPAG. Drop-in times should be re-established.</li> <li>• There is an increasing need for adult learning / training / education opportunities in town.</li> </ul>
<p>Buildings and Physical infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Pannier Market and Assembly Rooms are valued community assets, with considerable potential. A new lift and better catering facilities would massively improve the Assembly Rooms.</li> <li>• The Amory Centre is underutilised and not considered to be community friendly as it is</li> </ul>

	<p>expensive to hire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community College and schools facilities (both sport and other recreation) are considered underutilised with access requested out of school term-time.</li> <li>• The creation of a sports' hub is warmly welcomed with support for a wide range of physical activity excluding swimming which is catered for by the existing pool. Consideration should be given to including after-sports leisure (bar, food and function room) within a hub.</li> <li>• Facilities in a new Youth Resource Centre should be complementary to a new sports hub.</li> </ul>
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community Woodlands are highly valued and worthy of further funding.</li> <li>• Allotments are valued and generate interest and ideas, including innovative opportunities for co-operation, selling produce and community participation.</li> <li>• Access to the countryside is fairly difficult. Development may bring opportunities to improve footpaths, bridleways and multi-use paths.</li> <li>• The public spaces in the town are woefully under-equipped for children. The Recreation Ground has the potential for much greater use with minimal improvements and some equipment. The Central Park needs urgent upgrading.</li> </ul>

Source: South Molton Community Company – South Molton Strategic Action Plan

## 7.2 North Devon and Torridge Local Strategic Partnership – January 2010

7.2.1 The Local Strategic Partnership Federation Event engaged a wide range of community and economic stakeholders for each main town, each group focused on the identification of existing infrastructure deficiencies and the opportunities and solutions for future delivery to support growth proposals in each main town.

Table 19: Summary of Local Strategic Partnership Event

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town’s population is 4,500 but the two medical centres in East Street have 11,000 registered patients, so town serves a large rural area: new accommodation for GP surgeries is required urgently; money is available but a site is required; new larger surgery would provide wider healthcare including optician, dentist, physiotherapy, phlebotomy, avoiding need to travel to ND Hospital and other healthcare services could be integrated into a new hub, e.g. chemist</li> <li>• Redeveloping existing sites could solve capacity for 5 years but there won’t be money for a new surgery required after that</li> <li>• Central location preferred to enable access by bus and reduced parking requirement: Sainsbury’s site would be ideal but would take too long to deliver; availability of site within livestock market is uncertain; development land is expensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed cluster of sports pitches and facilities close to College with opportunity to share facilities with College; Community will exits and funding has potential; Site access is required through new development</li> <li>• No gym in South Molton</li> <li>• Provide corner shops and neighbourhood community hubs</li> <li>• Provide additional allotments and/or community garden – long waiting list</li> <li>• Allotment plots should be allocated to the whole community not just new development, to tie the community together</li> <li>• Population uses fields around town informally – don’t build on them all as informal use (e.g. sledging and dog walking) is important</li> </ul>
<b>Pedestrian and cycle paths</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide bus lay-bys in new developments to accommodate bus routes</li> <li>• Local bus services should serve housing with opportunities for routes through estates</li> <li>• Support shuttle bus between Pathfields and Town Centre, but need to have sufficient attractions in town centre to encourage linked trips</li> <li>• Potential for Park and Ride/Change site at Pathfields</li> <li>• Use of public transport is also linked to perceived availability of parking at destinations (e.g. Barnstaple town centre)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need better links between Pathfields and Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists</li> <li>• Need bridleways/cycleways not just footpath links as part of integrated Green Infrastructure network</li> <li>• Extend footpath along river between an orbital footpath route and Borners Bridge Junction</li> <li>• Footpath under Borners Bridge is dark, muddy and slippery and needs improving</li> <li>• Cycleways should be on wider pavements (separated from pedestrians) for safety, not at the edge of the road, to avoid drain covers and passing vehicles</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developers can contribute to bus services through s106 contributions, but where are the priorities for it being spent? (e.g. new routes, higher frequency, different timing)</li> <li>• Improve routes, frequency and timing of buses for more integrated network</li> <li>• Bus service goes to Tiverton town centre but there is no bus service on to Tiverton Parkway train station – the only option by train is Barnstaple to Exeter and then to Tiverton which takes hours</li> <li>• Need better bus service from South Molton to Barnstaple train station</li> <li>• Improve existing railway lines but no funding available to introduce new routes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cycling along road to Kings Nympton is dangerous as narrow and windy road with fast traffic</li> <li>• Improve cycle routes to Barnstaple</li> <li>• Provision of secure cycle parking and shower facilities in town centre and/or Pathfields would encourage cycling</li> <li>• Safe walking routes to schools are required in new developments and throughout the town, meeting ‘secure by design’ standards</li> <li>• Footpaths should meet the needs of the elderly, e.g. wider paths and even surfaces</li> <li>• Footpaths need to form network to link town centre, Pathfields, schools, recreation areas and different parts of the town</li> <li>• Lighting is required in community woodland to enable walking to Pathfields</li> </ul>
<b>Roads</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate off-street parking is essential</li> <li>• Roads should be designed wide enough to accommodate on-street parking without blocking delivery lorries and emergency vehicles</li> <li>• Central car park is essential to mitigate impact of on-street parking on surrounding residential roads</li> <li>• If no public car park available, many visitors/shoppers will just go elsewhere</li> <li>• Provide electric charge points in car parks for future electric and hybrid vehicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borners Bridge is dangerous and needs upgrading, possibly with a roundabout</li> <li>• Need new road junctions (Station Road and North Road) to serve Parsonage Lane development</li> <li>• Concern that access via Mole Ridge Way would be dangerous with traffic passing along residential lane</li> <li>• Tourism traffic could have an impact on roads, but is most likely between existing rush hour peak traffic</li> <li>• People will commute (to and from South Molton) even if jobs provided near housing</li> <li>• Can’t keep building more roads and accommodating more cars indefinitely</li> </ul>
<b>Service Delivery</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New junior school is required</li> <li>• Currently spare capacity in infants school, but capacity insufficient for proposed growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services should be available within the town (at Amory Centre) to reduce travel to Barnstaple</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New primary school should be near College for shared trips</li> <li>• College currently has no sixth form as inadequate numbers, and lack of sixth form doesn't attract as many teachers</li> <li>• All South Molton teachers choose to live outside town. Need extended services within town but lack of funding available - ask DCC's Extended Service Coordinator</li> <li>• Provide more courses after school and in school holidays</li> <li>• Site required alongside Infant school</li> <li>• Some students leave education to enter family business (including agriculture)</li> <li>• 'Excelerate' reduces exclusion of young people (14-19) to re-engage in education, training and employment</li> <li>• Encourage local apprenticeship opportunities</li> <li>• Some professional opportunities available within the town (e.g. MVF, Davisons)</li> <li>• Barnstaple offers more opportunities and new experiences as a bigger town</li> <li>• Hard to access Petroc College from South Molton by public transport</li> <li>• Provide local training opportunities within town</li> <li>• Leisure courses bring in money to help support adult education courses</li> <li>• Range of courses is declining due to Adult Community Learning structure and funding</li> <li>• College provides a suitable venue for Adult Community Learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make South Molton a service hub for rural areas by creating a critical mass and expanding it as a retail centre</li> <li>• Keep jobs in South Molton to reduce need to travel</li> <li>• Provide corner shops with urban extensions</li> <li>• Support faster broadband</li> <li>• Put services under the pavement rather than under the road to avoid having to dig up roads</li> <li>• Rural areas still don't have any broadband access</li> <li>• All new housing should have broadband cabling installed</li> <li>• Support ability to work from home to support jobs in rural areas reducing the need to commute</li> <li>• Communal broadband hub within the urban extension would improve accessibility of ICT</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All development should be built to Secure by Design standards, including planting, natural surveillance, designing out crime</li> <li>• Crime shows a downward trend but fear of crime is increasing, but good design could alleviate that</li> </ul>	

## 8 Vision

- 8.1 The following vision was published in the Pre-Publication North Devon and Torridge Joint Core Strategy (January 2010).

*“Housing and employment growth at South Molton will promote greater self-sufficiency with enhanced community facilities for the town and its large rural catchment area helping to reconnect the town and countryside. The market town will further develop as an agricultural business centre to serve North Devon, through strengthening the town’s historic links with the agricultural sector, regenerating and enhancing key sites and taking advantage of its accessibility to the strategic road network.”*

- 8.2 The vision from Molton Area 2000’s original strategic action plan in 2003 was:

*“To encourage social and economic regeneration of the Market Town in such a way to exploit our uniqueness, environment and heritage and to improve the quality of life of those who live, work, play and visit for Today and Tomorrow”.*

## 9 Key Land Uses

### 9.1 Housing

- 9.1.1 The housing requirement in Table 20 was established from the now abolished Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS) based on an overall North Devon housing requirement of 10,900 from 2006 to 2026. Following consultation responses to the Pre-Publication North Devon and Torridge Joint Core Strategy, together with the proposed abolition of the RSS, it has now been decided to review the proposed level of housing provision for South Molton and for the district as a whole.

Table 20: Housing Requirements 2006 – 2026

South Molton housing requirement	1,200
Completions 2006 – 2011	251
Commitments 31 March 2011 (including dwellings under construction, existing planning permissions and outstanding local plan allocations)	275
Additional non-strategic provision	674

Source: North Devon and Torridge Joint pre-submission Core Strategy (January 2010) and NDC Annual Housing Monitoring

9.1.2 As of October 2010 there were 164 households on the housing register living in South Molton, which equates to about 6.5% of the District's overall need based on the housing register. It is also recognised that not all households in housing need will be on the register. In South Molton there are approximately 327 social houses, about 14% of the total housing stock in the area, which is higher than the overall proportion of social housing in North Devon (10%) and Devon (13%) but still below a national figure of around 20%. The District Council's Affordable Housing Delivery Plan does not identify South Molton as one of the top priority areas for the delivery of affordable housing within the district.

9.1.3 A 50-bed extra-care housing scheme is required within the town. In 2010 there were 19 second homes or less than 1% of housing stock.

## 9.2 Employment

9.2.1 According to the Joint Rural Devon Employment Land Review (2006), the District as a whole needs to provide 45 hectares of new employment land by 2026 assuming significant provision of B1(a) office space within town centres. Demand is expected to change from light manufacturing to offices over this time frame, and mixed schemes should be promoted rather than traditional employment land. Town centre regeneration opportunities should be brought forward to fulfil an economic role rather than simply supporting retail centre functions.

9.2.2 Table 21 provides a summary of employment land provision in South Molton. There are approximately 11 hectares of undeveloped land at Pathfields Business Park where there is no planning permission for development apart from the original outline consent, in addition to 4.8 hectares allocated for a future livestock market (Proposal SMO3A) that does not yet have planning permission. There is also 0.7 hectares across 3 sites currently under construction and over 1,100 m<sup>2</sup> of vacant floor space.

Table 21: South Molton Employment Land Provision

		<b>Gross Floor Area</b>	<b>Gross Undeveloped Area (Hectare) Without</b>	<b>Gross Undeveloped Area (Hectare) With</b>	<b>Gross Area No Longer Available for</b>
Pathfields Business Park	7	1,134	11.00	0.7	0

Source: North Devon Council (31<sup>st</sup> March 2010)

9.2.3 The Joint Rural Devon Employment Land Review (2006) recommended that Pathfields Business Park, Horsepond Meadow and Norbord Hill all achieve an above average market ranking and an average physical ranking. Pathfields is identified as one of the district’s strategic employment areas alongside Roundswell, and has continued to expand during the recent recession. The level of demand from local companies may outstrip land availability if more development potential for (B1a) offices is not found in town centres and needs to be met on employment land.

### 9.3 Retail

9.3.1 South Molton’s level of retail floor space compared to other Area Centres is shown in Table 22, and significantly exceeds the level of provision in Braunton for a similar overall number of units.

Table 22: Retail Floor Space & Units

	Total Net Floorspace	Total Number of
Braunton	4,384	100
Ilfracombe	8,952	162
South Molton	6,029	101

Source: North Devon Retail Study (Scott Wilson Primary Research 2004) (Table 3.12)

9.3.2 The North Devon Retail Study (2006) concludes that if trading continues at the 2005 rate then approximately 2,567 sq. metres (net) of new comparison retail floor space would be required in South Molton by 2016, rising to 2,825 sq. metres (net) by 2021. The Retail Study also concluded that if trading continues at the 2005 rate then approximately 596 sq. metres (net) of new convenience retail floor space would be required in South Molton by 2016, rising to 969 sq. metres (net) by 2021.

9.3.3 Since the North Devon Retail Study (2006), new stores have opened at Griffins Yard, Mole Valley Farmers and RGB on Pathfields with an additional combined net sales area of approximately 1,800 sq. metres (net), but none of this is convenience retail provision. Consequently, a limited amount of comparison and convenience retail floor space for South Molton up to 2021 remains to be met, and additional retail needs may arise to reflect future population growth.

- 9.3.4 The town centre was assessed in December 2005 as being vital, viable and offering a diverse range of uses. South Molton had a healthy range of independent retailers who serve the local population. Due to the lack of multiple retailers, it is important not only that independent traders offer a wide range of services but that they help to maintain the local character of the settlement.
- 9.3.5 Vacancy levels (4%) were below the national average and below rates for Barnstaple and Ilfracombe, but show a relatively low proportion of retail (A1) uses. South Molton has a high level of service sector floor space, including pubs, hotels and financial services, with relatively little convenience and comparison floor space. The high proportion of pubs and hotels in South Molton is a reflection of its role as a 'market town'. In November 2010 there was a 7% vacancy rate, which remains lower than most of the District. It compares to a SW regional average of approximately 11%. Shops serve the local catchment population, whereas Barnstaple attracts shoppers for both comparison and convenience goods.

#### **9.4 Community Facilities**

- 9.4.1 The Infant school is at capacity and an additional primary school is required to accommodate any future growth in the town. The community college has spare capacity.
- 9.4.2 South Molton Health Centre is already under-sized for the current population and its large rural catchment area. There is inadequate room to expand on the current site and new facilities are required now, with further capacity required as the town grows over time. South Molton community hospital at Widgery Drive provides arrange of medical services including dialysis facilities.
- 9.4.3 South Molton has good sports provision but inadequate provision of equipped play areas and informal public open space, especially on the western side of the town. However, the town's community woodland provides a large accessible area for public recreation, which will be enhanced by the proposed Gullacombe development between Parsonage Lane and Station Road.
- 9.4.4 Land for future expansion of the town's cemetery is required to the south of the existing cemetery. There is also a lack of available allotment space.

## **9.5 Physical Infrastructure**

- 9.5.1 The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2009) identifies that South Molton is not vulnerable to flooding but much of the existing sewerage network lacks spare capacity. Surface water discharges will need to be strictly controlled and sustainable drainage systems, water storage and soakaways are needed to reduce increasing surface water flows in surface water sewers and the River Mole.
- 9.5.2 Access to superfast broadband is essential to homes and businesses in rural communities as much as in towns and cities. Funding has been secured from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) for delivery of superfast broadband across Devon and Somerset over the next 5 years. Additional funding has been sought from the Rural Development Programme for England towards improved broadband serving the rural areas around Exmoor National Park, which includes South Molton.

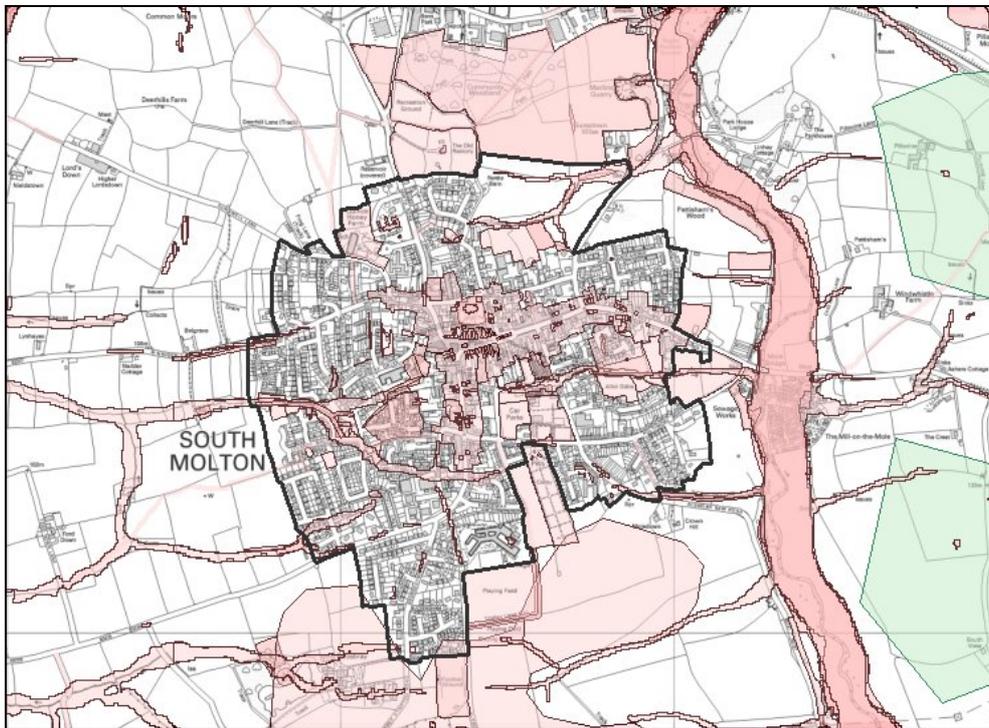
## **9.6 Transport**

- 9.6.1 Traffic management is required for busy junctions in South Molton town centre, including the junctions of Queen Street, West Street, North Street, North Road and Barnstaple Street; and the junction of Hugh Squier Avenue and Station Road. The junction of Station Road with the A361 at Borner's Bridge also needs enhancement for highway safety.
- 9.6.2 Any future development should seek to enhance the green infrastructure network within and around the town to facilitate improved opportunities for walking and cycling. Most existing routes are radial and orbital footpath links between would improve connectivity around the town. Future growth should enhance sustainable transport links to Pathfields and the town centre.

## **10 Potential for Growth**

- 10.1 There are relatively few constraints around South Molton, apart from steep slopes and the River Mole to the east and prominent ridges to the north and south of the town.
- 10.2 The 'Environmental Capacity Study' for South Molton mapped the distribution of environmental and heritage designations around the town, reflecting their relative significance (see Figure 2). The depth of colour indicates the individual or cumulative significance of these constraints. Hilltops and other elevated land (shown in green) are the only constraint not utilising an existing designation. This map helps to identify strategic areas with no or relatively few constraints that would be capable of supporting a degree of future development without significant impact upon these constraints.

Figure 2: Cumulative constraints around South Molton



Source: Environmental Capacity Study for South Molton (2011)

10.3 Areas with potential development capacity were also assessed to establish their strategic development capacity based on local environmental and infrastructure constraints. Those strategic areas with environmental and infrastructural capacity for potential growth outside or adjacent to the development boundary were identified (see Map 2). To facilitate the assessment of these potential growth areas, the unpublished North Devon & Torridge Core Strategy Strategic Site Assessment (November 2008) have been referenced.

#### 10.4 Gunswell Lane – Option 1

10.4.1 Land to the north west of South Molton between North Road and Nadder Lane, on either side of Gunswell Lane, has few significant environmental constraints. An elevated ridgeline to the northern side is prominent from the north where development could detract from the landscape setting at this entrance to the town. The majority of the sloping site is visible from the west. A new access from North Road would provide scope for improving road network connectivity on the western side of the town, especially if this option is considered in combination with Option 2 (west of Nadder Meadows and Parklands). It would help alleviate congestion at North Street / West Street junction. The site also offers good pedestrian connectivity to Pathfields Business Park, the community woodland and the town centre, and is located close to the infant school.

- 10.4.2 Land in this area has been submitted as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) site on behalf of the landowner and has been assessed as being developable.

### **10.5 West of Nadder Meadows and Parklands – Option 2**

- 10.5.1 Land on the western side of South Molton on gently rolling land with few environmental constraints. Small streams cross the site, providing important features in the green infrastructure and biodiversity networks. Sustainable drainage would be required to address surface water issues. The majority of the site is visible from the west, seen against the context of existing residential development.
- 10.5.2 The junction of Nadder Lane / West Street and North Street is congested and vehicular access from Option 1 (Gunswell Lane) would provide scope for improving road network connectivity on the western side of the town as far as the B3226. This option could be considered as a later phase of Option 1 (Gunswell Lane).
- 10.5.3 Land in this area has been submitted as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) site on behalf of the landowner. The southern section (adjoining Parklands) has been assessed as being developable, whereas the northern section (adj. Nadder Meadows) was not developable without additional land to overcome highway constraints.

### **10.6 West of Exeter Gate – Option 3**

- 10.6.1 This site is on the south western side of town to the south of the B3226 towards Clapworthy. Much of this site is grade 2 agricultural land and this site is smaller than the other options being considered. Development here would increase pressure on the existing road network and junctions in the town centre, especially traffic towards Pathfields and the A361, unless considered as a long-term option following completion of Options 1 and 2. It is close to the Community College and provides opportunities for pedestrian access.
- 10.6.2 Part of the land in this area has been submitted as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) site on behalf of the landowner and has been assessed as being developable.

### **10.7 South of Alswear New Road – Option 4**

- 10.7.1 Land to the south of South Molton would be accessed from Alswear New Road. Whilst there is limited provision for pedestrians along this road, the Sheep Fair field provides an alternative pedestrian access towards the town centre and central car park. The site adjoins the Community College and any new junction could help to improve vehicular access to the College. Part of this site would be needed for a future extension to the cemetery. Much of this site is grade 2 agricultural land and a ridge on the southern part of the site would restrict views from outside the town. The rest of the site slopes towards the north-east.

- 10.7.2 Land in this area has been submitted as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) site on behalf of the landowner and has been assessed as being developable.

## **10.8 Land within the Town – Option 5**

- 10.7.1 There are several key sites providing key redevelopment opportunities within the town, including Kingdon's Yard off North Street, Moore's Garage off South Street, Quince Honey Farm off North Road and the Mole Valley Farmers site on North Street/Station Road. The central Car Park and Livestock Market will provide an opportunity for redevelopment for a range of town centre uses once the livestock market has relocated to Pathfields Business Park. Redevelopment of these sites will help to improve and enhance the town's street scene, as well as delivering required housing growth.

## **11 Key Issues**

- 11.1 Housing numbers in the Joint Pre-Submission Core Strategy (January 2010) are to be reviewed in response to the spatial issues affecting the town.

### **11.2 Developing Pathfields as an Agricultural Business Centre**

- 11.2.1 Pathfields Business Park to the north of the town has expanded as a vibrant economic centre where business and traditional employment uses are appropriate. The strength of Pathfields Business Park is its accessible location adjoining the A361, providing good access to Tiverton and the M5, as well as to Barnstaple and the surrounding rural hinterland. It has a diversity of business and commercial uses across a range of sectors, and hosts a concentration of agricultural businesses serving the surrounding rural area. Relocating the existing livestock market from the town centre, as well as supporting new agri-businesses to strengthen the town's historic links with the agricultural sector, would enhance the town's role as an agricultural business centre.
- 11.2.2 Unemployment remains low but household incomes are also below the average for the district. The expansion of Pathfields Business Park and its increasing contribution to the local economy, including through higher paid jobs, will be most effective if superfast broadband can be provided. While 3 hectares of undeveloped employment land is still available at Pathfields, there is capacity to provide additional employment land further west if required over the Plan period.

### **11.3 Regeneration of the Town Centre**

- 12.3.1 The large livestock market site, including the central car park to the south of the town centre, is a key site for the town's regeneration if the livestock market relocates to Pathfields Business Park. Its central location is accessible by public transport from the surrounding rural area and will facilitate town centre expansion with opportunities for provision of additional retail, office, leisure and healthcare proposals to meet the needs of the growing community and its large rural catchment. Redevelopment of this underused site will also provide opportunities to enhance the town's built heritage.

### **11.4 Delivering Housing to Meet the Town's Future Needs**

- 11.4.1 There has been substantial housing development in South Molton since the 1990s, although lower construction rates have resulted from recent recessionary market conditions. However, there remains a substantial supply of developable housing land including a number of unimplemented planning permissions and allocated housing sites without planning permission.
- 11.4.2 Additional housing growth will help to provide employees for future expansion of job opportunities at Pathfields, thereby reducing the need to commute into the town. A greater population will also facilitate and help to fund provision of new and improved infrastructure and community facilities that are currently over-stretched or lacking within the town.

### **11.5 Delivering New Infrastructure to Meet the Town's Needs**

- 11.5.1 South Molton's medical centre and the town's infant school are all filled beyond capacity. The town is severely lacking adequate social infrastructure, including a shortage of informal open space and equipped play areas. Future growth of the town will need to address these deficiencies.
- 11.5.2 A traffic management strategy is required to coordinate the movement of people, vehicles and public transport around the town and between the town centre and Pathfields. Opportunities to facilitate linked trips for the business park and town centre, and to reduce the need to drive between them, should be investigated, including the potential need for a park and ride/change facility.
- 11.5.3 Key junctions that need upgrading to accommodate potential growth should be identified and provision made for the funding of necessary junction improvements.

## **11.6 Delivering Additional Green Infrastructure**

- 11.6.1 South Molton does not currently have a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), so does not meet Natural England's ANGST Plus standard (see section 2.13). Opportunities to create a LNR of at least 5 hectares should be considered for the existing Community Woodland and its potential future extension. The existing site has identified biodiversity value, is within public ownership and can be managed for nature conservation value, which would fulfil the requirements for a LNR.
- 11.6.2 Any future development should enhance the green infrastructure network within and around the town to help facilitate improved opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding to create better linkages between the town and Pathfields Business Park.

## **12 Conclusion**

- 12.1 This study has found that South Molton has experienced high levels of recent growth and Pathfields Business Park has become a vibrant economic centre, especially for land based industries. However, the town is in need of higher paid jobs and new and improved infrastructure to meet existing deficiencies as well as to meet the needs of future growth within the town. The growth of Pathfields, including the potential relocation of the existing livestock market, is driving economic and social regeneration of the town.
- 12.2 A total of four strategic growth options have been identified.

## **13 What Happens Next?**

- 13.1 You are invited to comment on the issues raised in this document, including identifying any opportunities and/or issues raised by the potential growth options identified in section 10 (refer to Map 2).
- Gunswell Lane – Option 1
  - West of Nadder Meadows and Parklands – Option 2
  - West of Exeter Gate – Option 3
  - South of Alswear New Road – Option 4
- 13.2 You need to use your knowledge of the area, taking account of surrounding sensitive landscapes, steep slopes, areas subject to flooding and the existing built up area, to help inform your decision.

**(1) Which of these sites are the most appropriate locations to deliver sustainable growth for South Molton, to meet the town's future needs and priorities?**

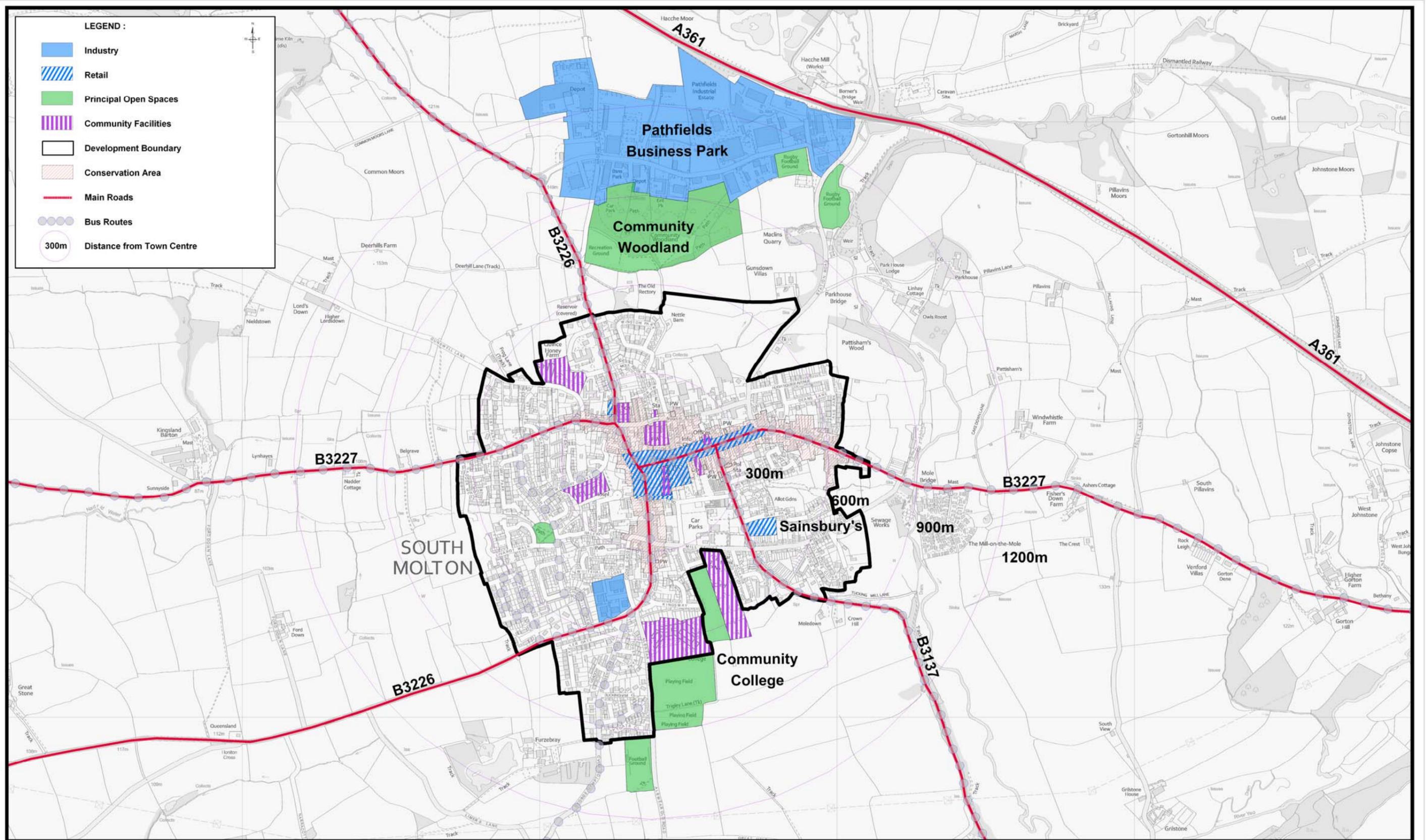
- 13.3 The Key Issues for the villages are identified in section 11. These will need to be addressed by working together to help achieve sustainable growth and meet the community's aspirations. The joint Core Strategy will help to deliver this.

**(2) Have the most relevant Key Issues for South Molton been identified?**

- 13.4 Some of the Key Issues identified can only be addressed through further development, with funding for delivery of additional infrastructure dependent upon future development.

**(3) What level of growth is necessary and appropriate to address the Key Issues identified for South Molton?**

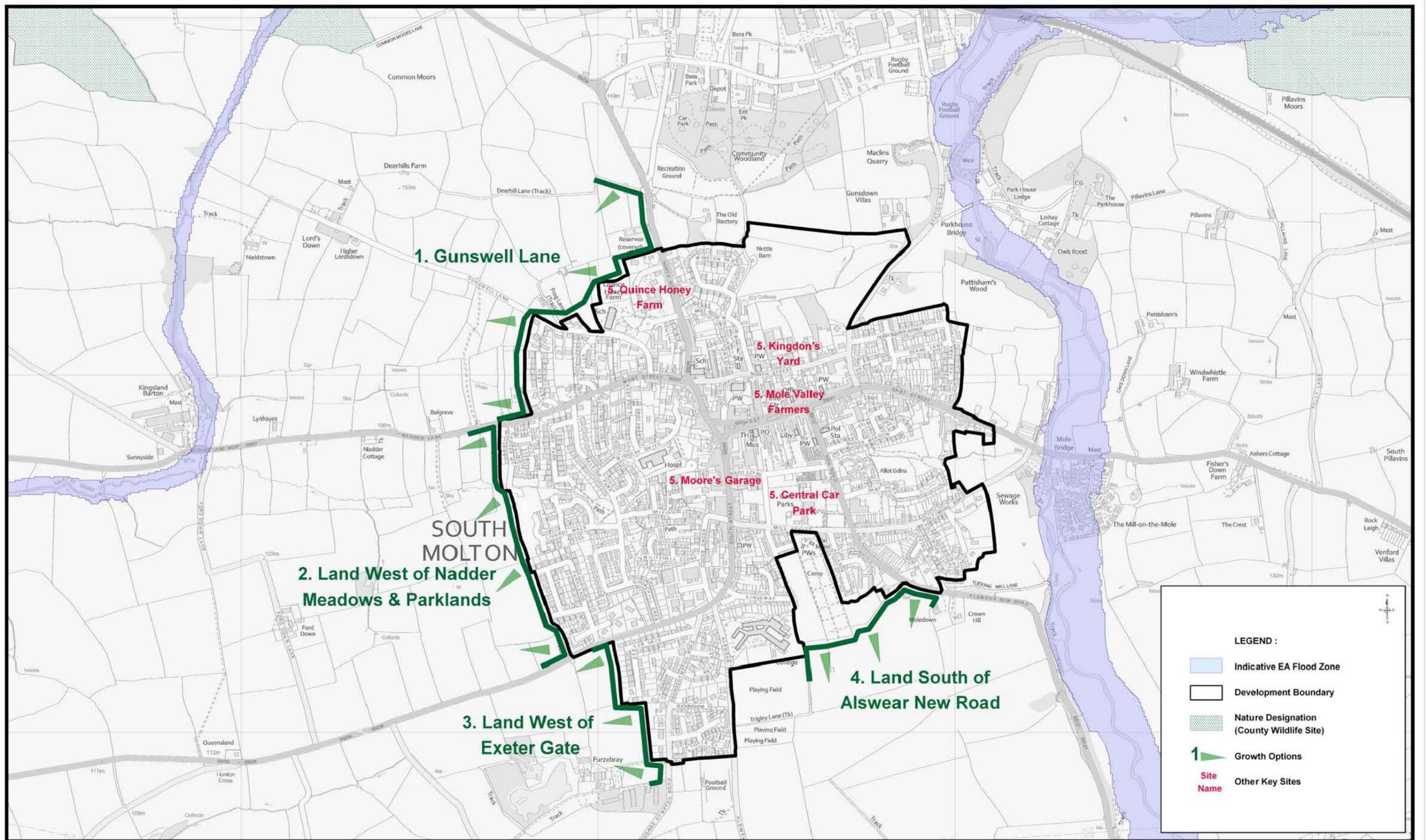
- 13.5 Feedback to this Town Study will be used to inform the vision, strategy and proposals for South Molton to be included within a revised version of the joint Core Strategy to be published in early 2012.



South Molton Town Profile  
**Map 1 : Existing Land Uses**

**COPY SUPPLIED TO:**

**Scale:** 1:12000  
**Date:** 3rd August 2011



**LEGEND :**

- Indicative EA Flood Zone
- Development Boundary
- Nature Designation (County Wildlife Site)
- Growth Options
- 1 Site Name Other Key Sites

South Molton Town Profile

**Map 2 : South Molton Constraints and Growth Options**



**COPY SUPPLIED TO:**

Scale: 1:10000

Date: 28th July 2011