

Price paid by Lower quartile



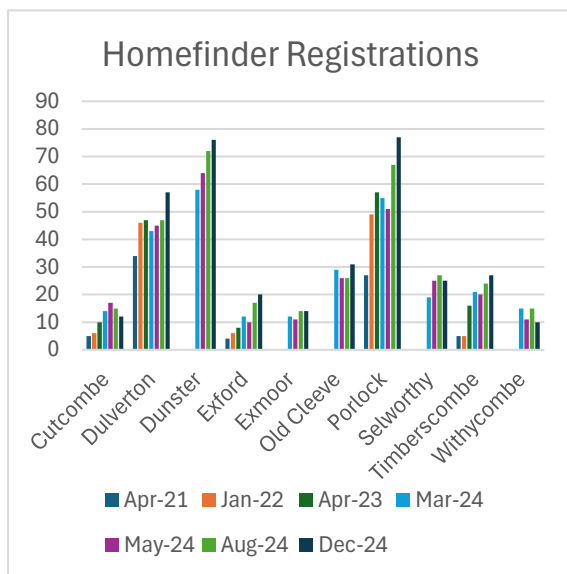
# Exmoor LCN

## Affordable Housing

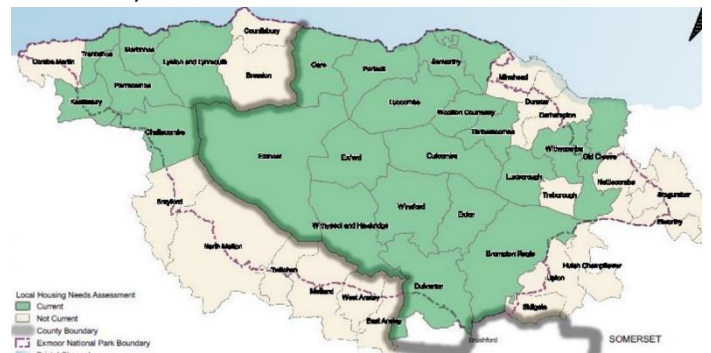
### A search for possible sites

#### Background: Housing Need

We know that over time housing is generally getting less affordable. Somerset’s Business Intelligence Unit is working on tracking lower quartile house prices (see map extract above) and Exmoor National Park Authority have further evidence from the report they commissioned from Arc4 and Rural Housing Solutions.

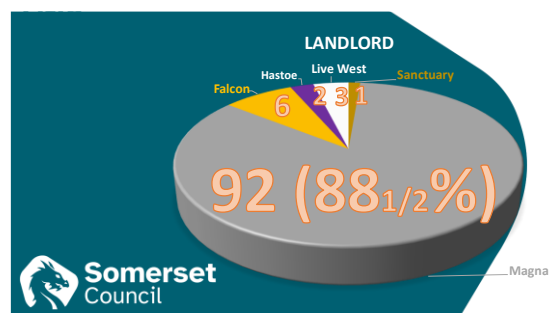


We already have evidence of housing need, from local Housing Needs Surveys (see map below), although these are all getting older, and ‘live’ data from Homefinder (see sample chart left).



Overall, we can assume that there is some level of housing need in each Parish across the entire National Park and (as evidenced from the historic local HNS) that it is probably higher than just those households currently registered on Homefinder Somerset or Devon Home Choice.

Some of this housing need may be met when vacancies occur within the existing social housing stock. However, the majority of such vacancies are not currently governed by a local connection criterion and therefore won’t necessarily meet very local need.



## **Background: What can Parish Councils do?**

There had been some discussion at the LCN of tackling empty properties to bring them back into use and, perhaps, meet some of the housing need that otherwise might go unmet. At a meeting last year, the Rural Housing Enabler for Exmoor suggested that if Parish Councils wanted to do something about the housing need still outstanding, their time and energy might be more effectively used considering possible sites, knowing how entangled many of the issues around long-standing empties can be. Of course, they may still wish to concentrate their efforts on empty properties for other reasons, such as possibly eliminating an eyesore.

## **Background: Why Exmoor National Park only?**

The Exmoor LCN includes parishes that are either entirely or partially outside the boundary of the National Park that it shares a name with. However, there are, of course, different prevailing Local Plans.

The Local Plan covering Exmoor effectively means that any site being proposed must be substantially for affordable housing, although some market housing (restricted to principal residence only) may be accepted on such sites to create 'cross subsidy'. Therefore, within the National Park, any potential site identified is not subject to potential speculative development.

The same cannot be said for parishes entirely outside the National Park and for those parts of parishes that 'straddle' the boundary where the current Local Plan is the old West Somerset Local Plan.

The new Unitary council of Somerset is obliged to replace all the former District level Local Plans it inherited (five in total) with a single Local Plan for the County (excluding Exmoor National Park). Changes recently introduced by Government to the 'standard assessment method' effectively means that Somerset now has to find land to accommodate more housing overall (a 41% increase on the previous projection). One of the preliminary stages is the 'Call for Sites' which has just been launched (box below extracted from Somerset Web Site).

We have launched a 'Call for Sites' which will run for 6 weeks from **13 January 2025**. The deadline for submissions is **24 February 2025**.

During this time, landowners, developers, and site promoters can submit land they want to develop to the Council. This process is crucial for gathering information to help create the new [Somerset Local Plan](#), following national policy and guidance.

After submissions, we will assess each site's suitability, availability, and achievability. A report will be published summarising these assessments and the process followed. These assessments will help decide which sites might be considered in future consultations for the new Local Plan. However, the Call for Sites is just one of many ways we gather information for this process.

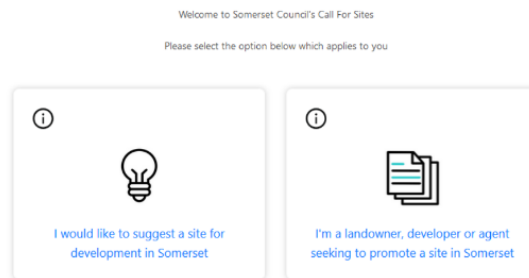
Any sites put forward that are assessed as suitable in planning terms and eventually 'allocated' in the new Local Plan will be subject to planning obligations (assuming they

## Who can submit a site?

Anyone is welcome to submit a site. However, unless the site is submitted by or on behalf of the landowner, by a developer with an option to develop the site or is otherwise accompanied by evidence to demonstrate that it is or will become available for development, then this will affect assessment of the site's availability and achievability. Local plans need to identify sites for a range of uses over their plan period. So, a range of sites that are available now and in the future is important.

It is important to have an idea of where the public and public bodies such as city, town and parish councils would see development being more acceptable/desirable. It is also important that local plan allocations are informed by a balanced assessment of site suitability, availability and achievability, not simply the land that is available and right now.

When accessing the site submission portal, submitters will have the choice of whether to submit the site as someone promoting a site with an interest in the land, or as an individual simply suggesting a site for consideration.



are large enough – currently 10+ homes) which will include the provision of some affordable housing, subject to viability.

Parish Councils can suggest that sites are put forward (& not just for housing) under the 'Call for Sites'. The box left is an extract from the submission guidance document.

You can find more detail on the website here: [Local Plan Call for Sites](#)

The 'Call for Sites' doesn't actually stop sites being

considered for an affordable housing scheme under the current West Somerset Local Plan, but it is highly likely that landowners would prefer to have their site considered for the new Local Plan as, if approved, it will then attain a higher development value.

Finally, a reminder that the remit of the Rural Housing Enabler for Exmoor is to work within the boundaries of the National Park.

Therefore, this briefing note is aimed at parishes entirely within the National Park and for 'straddling' parishes, those parts that fall within the boundary.

## Briefing Note: Possible Site Identification

This briefing note is intended to help Parish Councils draw up a rough list of possible sites that could be considered to meet very local housing need.

More detail can be found in the Rural Housing Alliance guide for Parish Councillors which you can download from here:

[parish\\_councillors\\_guide\\_to\\_rura.pdf](#)



The following is the most relevant page extracted from the guide:

## Finding a suitable site for a Rural Exception Site scheme

### What makes a suitable site for a rural exception scheme?

By definition for a site to be considered a Rural Exception Site it is not allocated in the local plan for residential development.

Beyond that there are a number of factors that will be taken into consideration to decide whether or not it is suitable.

Here is a checklist of what the planners and housing associations will be looking for.

#### Location

**Is it within or adjoining the village?**

**Are there any existing or failed planning applications for the site?**

#### The Site

**How big is it?** It is unlikely to be accepted if it is bigger than 2 acres.

**What is its current use?** It could be farmland, or a piece of undeveloped land that is lying vacant or unused. It could also be a site that has been used for some other purpose, perhaps a farmyard, garage or workspace. Sometimes local authorities might have small pockets of land that they no longer use.

**What is its topology?**

Is it flat or on a slope? Does it flood?

**Are the boundaries clear?**

Are they clearly marked on the ground?

Is it registered with the Land Registry?

**Will the ground conditions affect building work or costs?**

Is there any contamination from previous uses?

What underlies the soil and how far down?

**Are there any overhead cables?**

**What trees are on or forming the boundary of the site?**

It will be necessary to know if any of the trees are subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

#### The Site (Continued)

**How easy will it be to connect the development to services?**

Is it on main sewers and water?

How near is it to electricity supply?

How near is it to broadband supply?

**Are there any special /protected flora or fauna on the site?**

Is it near to a statutorily protected habitat? - For example: Newts/badgers/bats to name a few, Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

**Are there likely to be any bones or archaeological remains?**

#### Access

**How easy and safe will it be for people and cars to exit and access the site?**

**How near is it to a road?**

**Will it be possible to gain access on to the road?**

**Will it need /is there room to put in splay lines so there is safe car access onto the road?**

**Will any traffic calming measures be needed?**

#### Landowner

**Is the landowner known?**

**Are they willing to sell the site?**

**Are there, or will they seek, any covenants on the site?**

This may seem like a daunting list of requirements, but at this stage it is about producing a shortlist of potential sites and it is certainly worth putting all possible sites forward. Through design or drawing in additional funding it might be possible for an improbable site to become the one chosen to best meet the identified need.

Much of the above is probably too detailed at this stage but serves well to outline the issues that one may need to consider. Some of the above factors can be checked as a 'desktop survey' exercise – for example looking at flood zone maps.

For the purposes of this exercise, it is suggested that a more 'rough and ready' approach is taken, based on local knowledge and direct observation. In other words, a 'first pass' intended only to identify possible sites, which can then be looked into in more detail.

The ideal site is unlikely to exist, it is more probable that the most suitable available site will still have some issues that need to be addressed and it may be that what you initially think is your preferred site turns out to have an issue which is too costly or time consuming to resolve.

At this stage it is **not** recommended that landowners be approached, only that Parish Councils record whether or not they know who the landowner is. Similarly, any public discussion of sites is best left until a more detailed assessment can be undertaken to narrow down to a shortlist of the most suitable. Consultation of the community at large can take place after the preferred site is identified (and with the knowledge of why other sites were not preferred if a member of the public happens to suggest one of them).

Having recorded what information you do already have on each potential site, please contact the Rural Housing Enabler to discuss a more detailed investigation of those sites which appear to be possible candidates and/or those where you are unsure.

*The following pro forma can be used, as a guide, to record information on each possible site.*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>What to record</b>	<b>Your observations</b>
<b>Site</b>	Identify the site on a map, giving it a name and being clear about its boundaries	
<b>Planning History</b>	Has it had planning permission either granted or refused in the past	
<b>Ground conditions</b>	What is the land like, e.g. boggy? If known, what is the underlying geology	
<b>Current &amp; former use</b>	What is it used for now and, if known, what has it been used for in the past	
<b>Pollution &amp; Contamination</b>	Could there be any contaminants present, e.g. old sheep dip	
<b>Historic Environment</b>	Is it in a conservation zone or close to a listed building	
<b>Public Rights of Way</b>	What rights of way go over or close to the site; also note any permissive paths	
<b>Access</b>	How would vehicles access from an adopted road (both when occupied and during construction)	
<b>Safe routes</b>	How could pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users get from the site to the main village	
<b>Proximity to village</b>	How far would one have to walk to get to shop/post office/school/bus stop etc	

<b>Factor</b>	<b>What to record</b>	<b>Your observations</b>
<b>Wildlife</b>	What sort of wildlife inhabits the site now? Could there be any protected species such as bats, badgers, dormice, slow worms etc	
<b>Flooding</b>	Does the site, or part of it, ever flood?	
<b>Designated sites</b>	Is the land within a designated site such as SSSI or historic monument?	
<b>Proximity to services</b>	How close are the main services such as electricity, water, broadband and sewerage/drains. Do cables or pipes cross the land?	
<b>Landscape</b>	How would building on the site affect wider views towards/away from the village	
<b>Other</b>	Are you aware of any other factor that might make a difference to choosing or rejecting this site	
<b>Landowner</b>	If known, identity/contact details of landowner	