

The Economy: Employment and Business



DR

Introduction

North Tawton is one of West Devon's more important settlements, providing local services and facilities for the surrounding rural parishes. In recognition of this it was identified as an important local centre for the surrounding villages in the West Devon Core Strategy (2011) and is named as one of the 'Local Centres' in the (Draft) Joint Local Plan. The location of the town and its easy access to the A30 means it has good links with Exeter and nearby Okehampton.

In 2016 the total population of North Tawton is 2067, of which 60.9% are aged between 16 and 64 years, slightly higher than in West Devon and the wider Devon County (JSNA Community profile 2016). In 2014 (North Tawton profile) of the 1009 residents aged 16-74 who were economically active, 346 were economically inactive or not working. Of those working just under 50% were full time employees, with 22% part time. A further 21% were self-employed either full or part time. Like most of West Devon, North Tawton has a higher proportion of economically active residents who are self-employed than the regional or national average.

In 2015 11.2% of North Tawton population were dependent on benefits or tax credits, with 9.2% unemployed (JSNA Community Profile 2016). This is a similar level to neighbouring Okehampton and in West Devon as a whole. 9% of young people aged 16-24 are claiming benefits, slightly higher than the South West and nationally. 76% of young people gained 5 GCSE's or more A*-C which is 20% higher than the national average and considerably higher than the West Devon average, something for the young people of North Tawton to be proud of. (JSNA Community Profile 2016)

North Tawton is well served by a number of thriving businesses which have been a significant feature within the local economy for many years. These include Gregory's Transport, Taw Valley Creamery (Arla foods) and Vital Dog supplies at The Barton; all have national or international reputation and provide excellent employment opportunities for the residents of North Tawton and the surrounding areas.

There are other smaller employers within the town offering a range of employment opportunities including local retail outlets, hospitality, health services, vets, skilled trades, agriculture, manufacturing and artisan and craft.

Although still thriving, the town has experienced closures and changes to businesses particularly within the main Square. In the past two years the Store, Hardware Shop and Nat West bank have closed. However on a positive vein the Pharmacy has recently purchased the old bank providing an updated and modern facility, and the Post Office has undergone refurbishment. As shops close or move premises there is a concern that these will no longer offer business or retail opportunities and be absorbed into the residential sector. A further recurring theme affecting the viability of the retail

Objectives

4. To provide a greater level and variety of employment within the town.
5. To welcome and support measures which maintain and improve the effectiveness and vibrancy of the town's retail and business centre, ensuring a thriving town.
6. To support the safeguarding of existing public transport and promote better links with other towns and areas - especially those of Exeter and Okehampton.

centre of the town is that of adequate car parking and congestion issues. The policies within this theme seek to address these concerns, through the support of the Objectives, to ensure that North Tawton continues to be a vibrant and thriving town.

The following sections of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) underpin these policies with specific paragraphs listed before each policy:

- Building a strong, competitive economy
- Ensuring the vitality of town centres
- Supporting a prosperous rural economy
- Supporting high quality communications infrastructure
- Promoting healthy communities

Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Local Employment Land

Policy E1 highlights the land within North Tawton that is currently utilised for employment and areas allocated within the JLP.

Planning permission for the Bathway Development includes an area of land allocated for employment use. This is currently the subject of a planning application for a further 28 houses with a request to use the land set aside for employment units to build more houses, part of the allocation made for another site, The Mill. The land at the Mill has planning permission for mixed use – housing and employment. Residents have for many years expressed a desire to see some positive development on the old Woollen Mill site. In the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire 47 out of 153 responses (31%) felt that the Old Mill site would be the best place for any new development, whether employment or housing, to take place. The Woollen Mill Project, an organisation with ambitious plans to redevelop the Old Mill site states on its website that the Project ‘aims to become a sustainable and enterprising heritage and cultural destination in West Devon with multi use spaces underpinned by a brand new energy built on the legacy of the past by the communities of now for the generations yet to come.’

There is some evidence of a need for businesses to seek new premises in the area; however this was only a small number of respondents within the Questionnaire (7 out of 23)

Relevant District & National Policies

- **JLP (draft)**
- **West Devon Borough Council Core Strategy 2011**
- **NPPF 21,22,28**

Policy E1 - Local Employment Land

E1 Local Employment Land

The following areas, shown on map X, are currently designated as local employment land:

- i) Haulage, Warehousing and Transport Depot**
- ii) Taw Valley Creamery**
- iii) The Barton**
- iv) Former Station Yard**

The following areas shown on map X are allocated as sites for employment use

- v) The Woollen Mill, Fore St**
- vi) Batheway Employment land**
- vii) Land at Taw Bridge**

Development proposals within these areas will be supported which:

- i) are for employment premises serving B1*, B2* or B8* uses (or a combination of these uses);**
- ii) provide sufficient and secure off-street parking for cars, vans, HGVs, and bicycles;**
- iii) have no adverse impacts on:**
 - a. the character of the built environment;**
 - b. the character of the natural environment and setting;**
 - c. residential amenity;**
 - d. traffic generation;**
 - e. noise; and,**
 - f. light pollution;**
- iv) do not contribute to increased flood risk and use Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to mitigate this risk;**

Proposals which result in a more appropriate or efficient use of the site as employment land will be supported:

- 1. Where proposals are for the extension of existing premises, they should demonstrate, through a business plan, a net increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs or demonstrate a need for the additional space to enable the business to grow.**

Proposals which propose a change of use to an alternative use or uses on the site will only be supported where:

- 2. The alternative proposed use fulfils a need for that use locally;**
- 3. It can be demonstrated that the use of the site solely for employment (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8) is no longer viable, through an active 12 month marketing exercise where the property or site has been offered for sale or letting on the open market for these uses at a realistic price and no reasonable offers have been refused.**

Mixed Use

Both the Bathway Site and the Woollen Mill currently have planning permission to provide Employment opportunities as well as Housing on the respective sites. *Further evidence is required to determine whether this is a viable or needed policy.*

Relevant District and National policies

- JLP (draft)
- NPPF 17(9),28,69

Policy E2 - Mixed Use

In order to maintain a local sustainable economy, mixed use proposals will be supported.

Development proposals for housing on sites of 10 dwellings or more should demonstrate that they have considered opportunities for mixed uses on the site.

Live-work Units

This Objective identifies the need to provide a greater level and variety of employment within the town. As evidenced above within **Policy E1** there is a lack of suitable or available land and sites for developing new employment opportunities. There is a need therefore for more creative and imaginative solutions. Live Work units offer a degree of flexibility and solution for residents seeking to develop a business and have affordable living accommodation. North Tawton has recently seen the development of such accommodation.

Relevant district and national policies

- JLP (Draft)
- NPPF 21, 28

Policy E3 - Live-Work Units

Development proposals which enable or facilitate working and living in the same building or on the same site will be supported where:

- i) they are well-related to the surrounding land and building uses;**
- ii) the uses do not cause unacceptable nuisance to neighbouring premises / properties;**
- iii) the proposal provides satisfactory living conditions for future occupants;**
- iv) they provide sufficient and secure off-street parking for cars, vans, HGVs, and bicycles;**
- v) they do not contribute to increased flood risk and use Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to mitigate this risk; and,**
- vi) there is no adverse impact on:**
 - a. the character of the built environment;**
 - b. the character of the natural environment and setting;**
 - c. residential amenity;**
 - d. traffic generation;**
 - e. noise; and,**
 - f. light pollution.**

Proposals which seek the change of use of existing employment space to form accommodation must demonstrate that such changes do not result in an unacceptable loss of existing employment space to the detriment of the local economy. Proposals should retain existing ground floor employment space.

To ensure that the supply of live-work employment premises are retained for the benefit of the local economy, and to prevent the use of this policy to achieve wholly residential use through conversion of live-work units in the future, new additional development of live-work units permitted under this policy must remain as their proposed use in perpetuity to support the local economy unless it can be demonstrated, through a robust local economic assessment, that there is no demand or need for the live-work unit to remain as such for 3 years from the point of assessment.

Maintaining the Retail Offer

North Tawton residents value the town's community spirit and the services and facilities around which that is centred. The hub of the town is The Square where the majority of the retail businesses lie. At one time there were shops selling a wide range of products in the streets leading into and around The Square ensuring that residents could buy everything they needed within the town. Today there are fewer shops however these continue to be much valued by the residents, particularly the older people of the town and those without transport.

In the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire just under 50% of respondents said they used the local shops daily rising to 90% for weekly visits. The majority of these used the Post Office and Pharmacy. 93% of respondents said they shopped in the town to 'top up' grocery shopping whilst only 7% did their main shopping in the town. The majority used Okehampton for their main shopping although

an increasing number use online shopping. In response to the question 'what kind of business should we be trying to attract to North Tawton' a significant number of respondents indicated independent shops and restaurants.

In response to the question 'what one thing would make you do more shopping in the town' the 3 main responses were a greater variety of shops offering more choice, cheaper products and better car parking.

Policy E4 provides an important timeframe for considering the future of retail premises if and when they become vacant thus indicating the value of retaining wherever possible the availability of choice for residents.

Relevant National & District Policies

- JLP (draft)
- NPPF 23,28, 70

Policy E4 - Maintaining the Retail Offer

North Tawton Town Centre and the town centre's primary retail frontage are defined on map X.

Within the town centre's retail area, the primary retail frontage will be protected from change of use and development proposals for change of use to non-retail and non-service uses will only be supported where they demonstrate that:

- i) they have been marketed for existing use for a period of 12 months;**
- ii) the proposal demonstrates that there is no demand for the existing or alternative uses suitable to the town centre retail area;**
- iii) options of conversion to alternative service uses have been considered and it has been demonstrated that such uses would not be viable and there is no market demand;**

Transport & Parking

As indicated elsewhere in this plan, car parking within North Tawton is a significant issue for residents. In the Questionnaire respondents indicated that the lack of adequate parking within the area of The Square prevented people from shopping in the town.

Stall holders at a recent Craft Market highlighted the issue of parking their vehicles to unload their goods as a significant reason for not returning to the town.

Related District & National policies

- JLP (draft)
- NPPF 29,41

Policy E5 Transport & Parking

To seek effective solutions to the provision of sufficient car parking within the town which enables local people and visitors to access shops and businesses

Safeguarding Public Transport and Opportunities for the reinstatement of the Railway

Currently there is no regular train service between Okehampton and Exeter. In the summer months there is a Sunday service which has proved popular with residents and visitors to the area. There has been a much publicised campaign to reinstate a regular all year round service between Okehampton and Exeter, a need which became even more urgent during the winter of 2014 when the mainline through Dawlish to the South West was closed due to flooding. North Tawton has not had its own Railway Station since the 1960s however should a regular service be introduced, the re-opening of a local station would be an aspiration for the town. This would not only provide access to Okehampton and Exeter for shopping and employment for residents but also bring visitors to the town and surrounding areas. **Policy E6** reinforces this commitment to supporting the reinstatement of the railway.

88% of respondents to the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire expressed support for the Okehampton to Exeter railway to reopen on a regular basis. 80% said they would use the railway for social reasons, 67% to connect to mainline train services, and 24% would use the train to travel to work.

30% of respondents raised the Bus Service as a transport issue, with a number of people highlighting the need for the buses to run later in the evening

Related district and national policies

- JLP (draft)
- NPPF 29,30,69

Policy E6 - Safeguarding Public Transport and Opportunities for the reinstatement of the Railway

The site of the North Tawton Railway Station and associated land identified on map X has potential to contribute to improved sustainable travel links and is therefore protected (safeguarded) for such uses should the opportunity to redevelop a new station and rail services be realised.

Safe Route from Moor View to the Barton

Improving the ease, safety and opportunities of walking and cycling routes can make a significant contribution to ease congestion, improve health and reduce the demand for car parking. In order to encourage more people to walk and cycle, routes need to be safe and accessible. North Tawton is fortunate to have a number of footpaths and public rights of way. These need to be available and maintained for walking and cycling, as well as being accessible for people with mobility issues. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the need for communities to protect and enhance public rights of way and access, in their commitment to promoting healthy communities.

In the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire, 41% responded that change or significant change was needed to provide or improve cycle paths in and around the town and 35% felt similarly in relation to footpaths. A number of respondents highlighted the need for better footpaths and safe cycle routes.

Residents from the new development at Batheway have already highlighted concerns about safe routes into the town along the main footpath. Public Footpath number 10 borders the west side of the Batheway development from Moor View to the Barton, however this requires upgrading to make it accessible to cycles, push chairs and mobility scooters and improve the surface for all users.

Policy E7 builds upon the need for improved safe routes in and out of the town.

Related district and national policies

- **NPPF 75**
- **JLP**

Policy E7 - Safe Route from Moor View to the Barton

Development proposals which create or facilitate the creation of a safe off-road cycle and footpath from Moor View to the Barton and to the train station (should it be reopened) will be supported where:

- i) there is no adverse impact on the immediate landscape setting;**
- ii) there is no adverse impact on amenity of nearby properties;**
- iii) the route is well-lit but there is no unacceptable impact from lighting the route, or adverse impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated**