

VERSION 4

NEWTON ST CYRES PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

DATE: AUGUST 2026



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NEWTON ST CYRES PARISH

COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

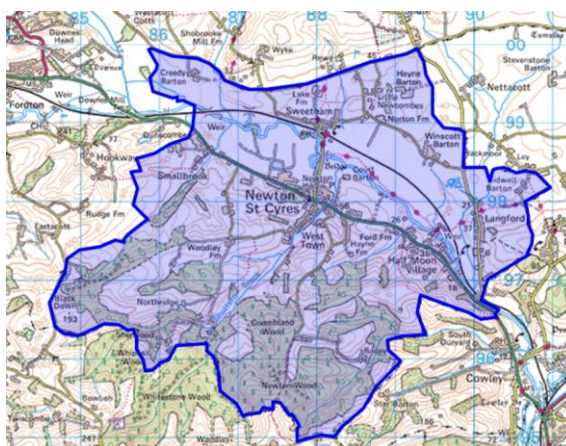
1. INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of the Framework

The Local Government system is, in 2026, in a state of flux with institutions, policies and plans being redesigned and reorganised. These include Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) and its Local Plan, and a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The purpose of this **Community Planning Framework** (NSC-CPF) is to:

Box 1: Map of the Parish of Newton St Cyres



- a) bring together the evidence base for planning within the Parish of Newton St Cyres to enable plans to be developed quickly after the new institutions become operational,
- b) to inform and influence the development of the MDDC Local Plan so that it reflects the priorities of the people of Newton St Cyres Parish, and
- c) to guide development within the Parish in line with the priorities of the community.

The NSC-CPF is not a Plan, it is a framework to assist plan development and assessment.

The Structure and Content of the Framework

The CPF collects a wide array of evidence to create an accurate picture of the Parish as it is now and how it has developed over time. It brings together the context of the Parish with census material and evidence from an array of local, regional and national documents which cast light on the evolution of the Parish and how it operates.

It discusses the physical environment, the natural resource base, the historic context, the demography, housing, the local economy, infrastructure, transport and energy, open spaces, institutions, and the policy and planning processes. It also reviews the past consultations which have taken place over the years to generate plans within the Parish. From these consultations, a summary of the community's priorities have been distilled.

The CPF then looks at the key opportunities that exist for taking those priorities forward. The CPF also looks at the challenges which the Parish faces in the coming years and how these might affect the Parish. Finally, the CPF states the Parish Council's position in relation to the ongoing local planning process.

This is not a static framework, it will evolve over time and change as the evidence base and policy environment change.

The Audience of the Framework

The audience of the NSC-CPF is the residents, social groups and commercial businesses of the Parish who have contributed to the development of this shared vision. It will also be a vital planning tool for both the Parish Council, and wider Local Government planning authorities which share responsibility for the development of the Parish.

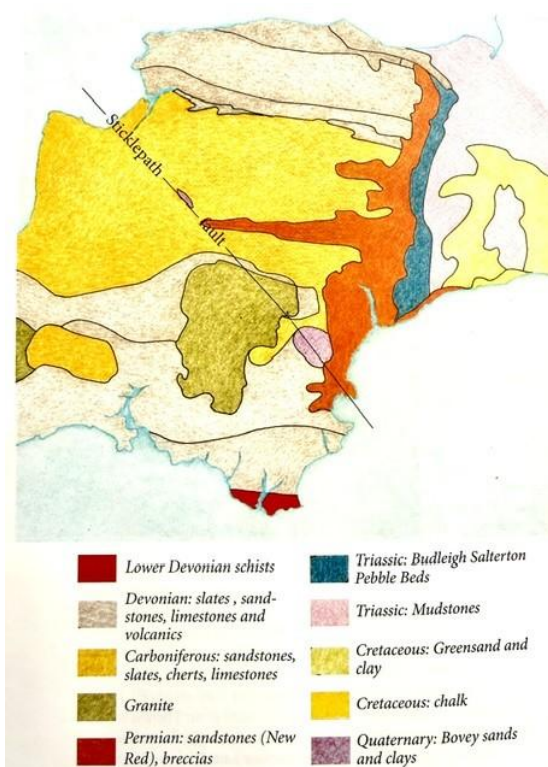
2. THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Geomorphology and Geology

Newton St Cyres is a rural parish which covers an area of 17.76 km² between Exeter and Crediton. Its geomorphology has been largely formed by the extensive floodplain of the River Creedy which bisects the Parish from the Northwest to the Southeast. The floodplain lies at around 25m above sea level. North and East of the river are rolling hills that rise to around 50m above sea level used extensively for agriculture. This area also includes the communities of Sweetham and Langford.

South of the river is steeper land which rises to around 200m above sea level. At its lower levels are the communities of Smallbrook, Newton St Cyres and Half Moon. Further South the rising hills are extensively forested.

Box 2: The Geology of Newton St Cyres



From "Devon's Geology an Introduction" by Robert Hesketh.

The geology of Newton St Cyres parish is dominated by Permian sandstone that forms the red breccias that give rise to the red soils. These red sandstones extend from the south coast of Devon almost to the north coast near Minehead. To the South of the Parish the breccias give way to Carboniferous sandstones.

The Red Sandstones are classified by Natural England as National Character Area 148 (see box 3).

The geology has also provided some riches which have, from time to time, been commercially exploited including silver, gold, lead and manganese.

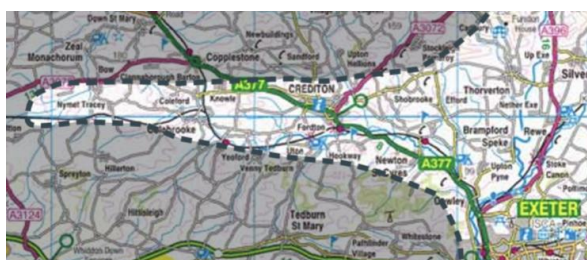
Hydrology

The River Creedy runs from the Northwest to the Southeast through the northern third of the Parish. It is fed by the Small Brook which flows into the Creedy North of Smallbrook hamlet. The Shuttern Brook flows parallel to the Smallbrook but further east and passes through the centre of Newton St Cyres village. Shuttern Brook has been designated a **Rapid Response Catchment** by the Environment Agency. This identifies it as being at risk of a high impact flood event that would could cause considerable damage to the associated housing. This is being monitored by the Parish Council through the use of an installed rain gauge.

The Shoebrook Lake flows from the North to the South, entering the Creedy close to where the Small Brook enters. Sweetham Brook also flows from the North past the hamlet of Sweetham onto the Creedy floodplain. The Jackmoor Brook flows from the hills to the North of the Parish along the Eastern edge to enter the Creedy near Langford Bridge. Numerous other small water bodies drain into the central flood plain. The floodplain is also supplied by water run-off from the hills to both the North and South of the Parish, this can be extensive at times. A map of

Box 3: Devon Redlands National Character Area

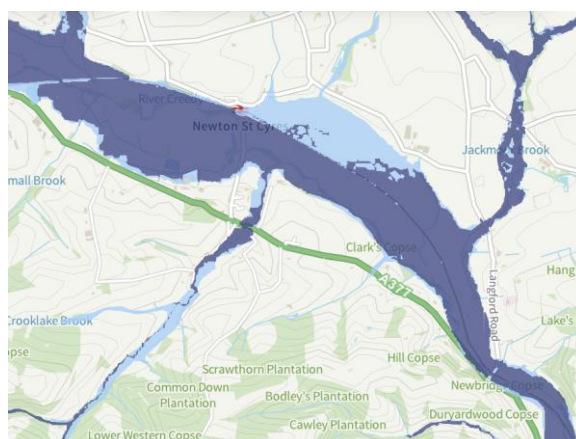
The Devon Redlands National Character Area (NCA) 148 has a very strong, unified character. The underlying red sandstone and consequent red soil dominate the landscape through ploughed fields, cliffs and exposures, and are visually evident in the traditional stone and cob farmsteads, hamlets and villages that are scattered across the area. Not only does the soil visually characterise the area but its fertility also makes it the agricultural heart of Devon. Mixed agriculture has shaped this landscape since medieval times, an era that left a dense pattern of deep and narrow lanes imprinted in the landscape.



The map shows the extent of the Redlands around Newton St Cyres.

From: Natural England, Natural Character Areas of England.

Box 4: Potential Flooding areas of Newton St Cyres



From: The UK Government "Flood Map for Planning".

the areas where flooding does occur, often annually, is shown in Box 4. This is likely to expand with climate change. This floodplain provides a vital service for protecting built up areas further downstream, particularly Exeter.

3. NATURAL RESOURCES AND BIODIVERSITY

The Parish has a wide diversity of ecosystems from farmland, through gardens, open spaces and woodlands. The various rivers also provide different habitats, as do the many hedgerows.

The Redlands sandstone soils are a major asset for agricultural production and a natural habitat for wildlife. The cultivated land provides opportunities for crop cultivation and for grazing cattle and sheep. Whilst farming tends to reduce biodiversity more farmers are realising the benefits of supporting biodiversity and are making extra efforts to enhance and diversify habitats (see Box 5). However, farming remains a major source of pollution in local streams and rivers.

Devon is known for its hedgerows, and this is also true of the Parish. These provide many opportunities for wildlife to shelter, nesting and feed.

Open spaces and garden within the Parish are also important ecosystems. Many people in the Parish take pride in their gardens and Newton St Cyres has been a winner in several categories in Britain in Bloom. Not all gardens are carefully cultivated but some areas have been specifically left for wildlife. These are complemented by wild areas in the churchyard, roadsides and the village green. The Arboretum, next to the church, has an excellent collection of trees from many parts of the world, and extensive wild areas and log habitats. The gardens at Sherwood House have national collections of several varieties of plants.

Moon Ridge farm in Half Moon is undergoing a major shift towards sustainability with extensive hedgerow and tree planting, and pond building. It has extensive fruit tree orchards including apples, pears, plums, grapes, cherries, date plums, apricots and peaches. They are also growing a

Box 5: Quicke's Farm Rewilding

By creating species-rich buffer strips at the margins of their land, the Quickes family are helping to protect watercourses like the River Creedy, enhancing them as habitats for important species such as the native crayfish. The same strips now run alongside many of their woodlands, too. Under the scheme they will create 2500m of species rich buffer strips to protect and create wildlife habitats.

Their farm is also home to over 40 Skylark plots perfect for nesting sites. The numbers of Skylarks in the UK have halved since the 1970s so this is an important conservation effort.

From: Modified from Quicke's website

Box 6: Cirl Bunting now re-established in the Parish



Photo from: RSPB.

diversity of nuts such as cob, chestnut, walnuts and almonds. The agroforestry works well with the swales and ponds slowing down the surface runoff and holding the water on site.

Orchards were much more common in the Parish in the past but there are many outcrops of orchard still surviving and more are being added or refurbished. They offer an important habitat for fungi, mosses, lichens, wildflowers, insects, birds and mammals.

Quicke's woodlands to the South of the Parish also provide a wide diversity of habitats for wildlife. This is managed by Forest England to sustainably support wildlife habitats. The wood is predominantly comprised of native tree species, including oak, beech, and ash, which create a diverse and vibrant ecosystem. The dense canopy provides shelter for a variety of wildlife, such as birds, squirrels, and deer, making it an ideal spot for birdwatching and wildlife spotting.

There are also over 50 trees with Tree Protection Orders in the Parish of Newton St Cyres which provide protection against damage or removal (Mid Devon District Council).

Foxes, badgers, rabbits, bats, hares, roe and red deer, weasels and hedgehogs are very common mammals throughout the Parish. Otters swim and breed in the river Creedy and White Clawed Crayfish, a rare sight in Devon, are also present. The Creedy is also adjacent to the Exe which is now an established beaver site. There are also grass snakes, slow worms and newts in the Creedy valley.

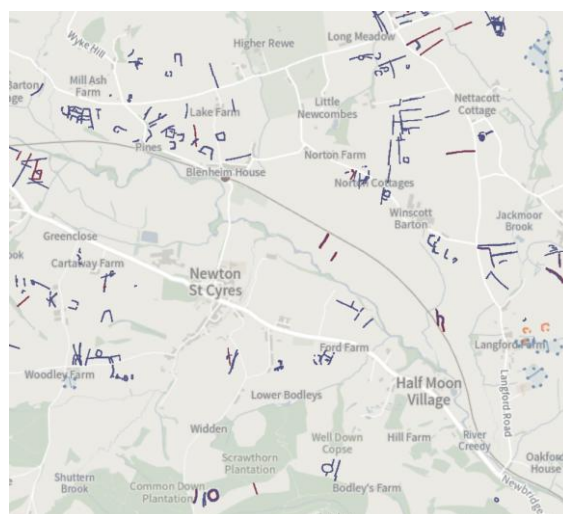
Many birds frequent the Parish including Red Kites. Cirl Buntings (see box 6), once a common bird in the farmland in Southern England, were almost lost from the UK. However, successful conservation efforts by farmers and conservationists have started to expand the population. Sweetham, in the Parish, is one of the areas where Cirl Bunting have re-established themselves in recent years.

4. THE HISTORIC CONTEXT

Newton St Cyres has many Roman and prehistoric sites as shown by the map in Box 7.

Prehistoric flints including several arrowheads have been found in the vicinity of Lake Farm. Several potential Bronze Age barrows have been recorded as crop marks in the north-east corner of the Parish near Shute Cross, Nettacott Cross and Winscott Cross and flints have also been found near these. In addition numerous enclosures of probable prehistoric or Roman

Box 7: Archaeological Sites in Newton St Cyres



From: Historic England

date have also been recorded as crop marks across the Parish, particularly in the vicinity of Lake Farm but also to the north-west and south-east of Newton St Cyres. The A377 is thought to be on the line of a Roman road between Exeter and Crediton.

The earliest documentary reference to Newton St Cyres is as **niwan tune** in 1050-73; the name meaning ‘new farm’. It is recorded as Niwetone in the Domesday Book, 1086. The suffix St Cyres appears to have been added by the 14th century and is documented as Seynt Serys Newton in 1525. John Leland, writing in the mid 16th century, described it as a townlet with a good bridge over the river.

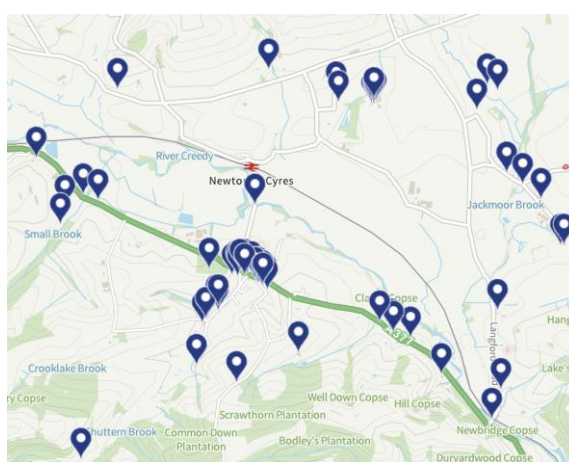
In the later 16th century the manor was owned by Walter Northcote, a wealthy woollen merchant from Crediton.

Thomas Quicke purchased a half share in the manor in 1572 and the family have farmed in the parish ever since, buying the other half share in the late 18th century. They built Newton House, a Palladian style mansion, just to the north-west of the village of Newton St Cyres in the 19th century but this was destroyed by fire in 1906.

The Parish is home to a number of historic farmsteads including Bidwell Barton, Langford, Lake, Smallbrook and Winscott which are all documented in the medieval period, and Norton which is recorded even earlier, in the late Anglo Saxon period. In addition there are a large number of listed buildings in the Parish, as shown in Box 8 with a major concentration in the centre of the village of Newton St Cyres, these are mainly cob and thatch buildings. Most of the buildings are Grade II listed buildings, the only Grade I listed building is the Church.

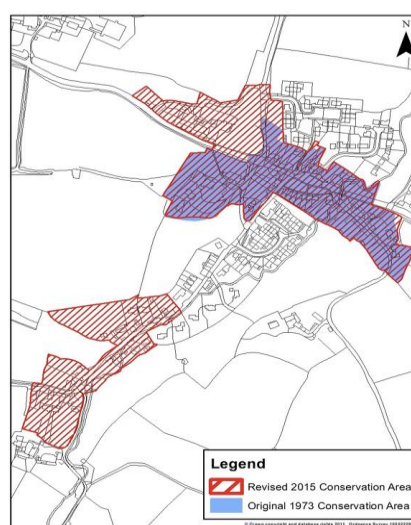
The village centre together with some of West Town and Newton House is now designated as a Conservation Area (See Box 9). The surrounding hilly land was formerly an Area of Great Landscape Value, but this designation was lost with the abolition of that category early this Century.

Box 8: Listed Buildings in Newton St Cyres



From: Historic England

Box 9: Conservation Area Newton St Cyres Village in 2015



From: Newton St Cyres Conservation Plan

5. DEMOGRAPHY

The 2024 census estimates a population in the Parish of 1,024 people. This is a slight rise on the population of 866 recorded in 2011 and 968 in 2021.

The age distribution of the population is shown in Box 10. **65% of the Parish population were under 60 years of age.**

Pensioners provide the bulk of the many volunteers that contribute to much of the working of the Parish.

In 2021, 92% of the Parish population were born in the UK. 47% were recorded as having no religion and 45% were Christian.

The 'household deprivation level' dataset of the 2021 census classifies households in Newton St. Cyres Parish by four dimensions of deprivation: Employment, education, health and disability, and household overcrowding. 51.8% of households were not deprived by any dimension. 33.7% were deprived by one dimension, 12.1% by two dimensions, and 2.4% by three dimensions.

Box 10: Age Distribution of the Parish Population

Age Distribution (E 2024)	
80+ years	85
70-79 years	143
60-69 years	133
50-59 years	136
40-49 years	131
30-39 years	110
20-29 years	68
10-19 years	122
0-9 years	100

From: 2024 National census estimate.

6. HOUSING

The traditional housing in the Parish is cob made of Redlands sandstone with thatched roofs (see Box 11). This are now mainly located in the Newton St Cyres conservation area.

There was considerable housing development in the parish in the last century, permitting an expansion of the population. This commenced with New Estate and Creedy View, in Sweetham, in the 1920s. In the 1950s there was the development of small estates at Tytheing Close and Shuttern Close, Godolphin Close and Woodlands (1960s), Court Orchard (1970s) and Meadowlands (1980s), all in Newton St Cyres village. In addition, individual houses were built, particularly in Sand Down Lane, and Marsh Mill and Newton House were converted into apartments. There were also a number of barn conversions (NSC Village Plan, 2016). Twenty five new house were built adjacent to the new Primary school in 2018 and eight new houses are being built on the old school site.

Box 11: Thatched Houses in Newton St Cyres Village



From: NSC Village Plan, 2016.

In 2022 there were 417 households in the Parish according to the Devon Communities Together Housing Needs Report. 68.9% of households were one family households in the 2021 census. 27.1% of households were occupied by one person. Of the single family households 20.9% were occupied by people over 65 years old. 15.7% of all households were occupied by single parent families.

40.5% of houses in the Parish are detached, 34.7% are semi-detached, and 18.9% are terraced. As regards tenure, 41.8% of homes are owned outright, 27% are owned but with a mortgage. 10.7% are rented from the local authority and 14.4% are rented from private landlords. Over 70% of houses are either three or four bedroom homes and 50.5% of homes have two or more unoccupied bedrooms.

7. LOCAL ECONOMY

Box 12: Redlands Agriculture, Newton St Cyres

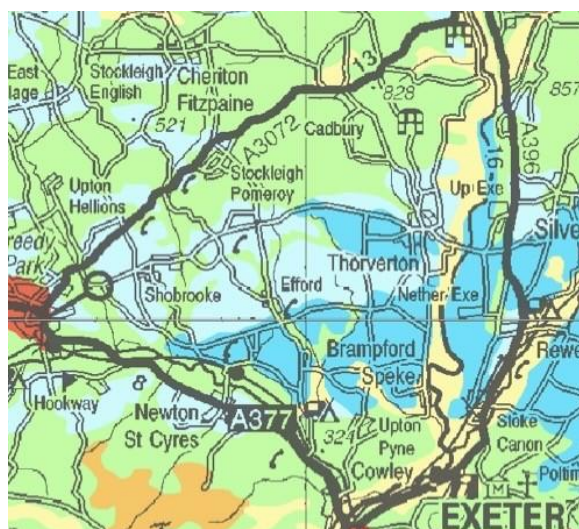


From: Photo by J. Campbell.

Newton St Cyres is the gateway to the Redlands, the agricultural heartland of Devon (See Box 3: Natural England, National Area Character Profile). The sandstone soils give the characteristics colour to much of the Parish (see Box

12). As a result of the unique geology, the soils are some of the best for agriculture in the country (Natural England), particularly those to the north of the River Creedy (see Box 13). These are classified as **Grade 1, Excellent** on a scale of 1-5. Grade 1 soil is relatively rare in the UK. Much of the land to the immediate South of the Creedy is

Box x 13: Map of Agriculture Land Classification for Newton St Cyres



Grade	Description
1	Excellent
2	Very Good
3	Good to Moderate
4	Poor
5	Very Poor

Non-Agricultural Land

- Other land primarily in non-agricultural use
- Land predominantly in urban use

From: Natural England, Agricultural Land Classification SW, 2018.

Grade 2 land. **Grade 1 & 2 are at the top of what the Government classifies as “the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land”.** It is treated as a finite national resource because it offers **the greatest flexibility for food production.**

Mixed agriculture has shaped the Parish since medieval times, an era that left a dense pattern of deep and narrow lanes imprinted in the landscape and many historical sites. Newton St Cyres remains an important food production, food processing and food retail area making a significant contribution to the local economy.

The main geographical distribution of primary production in the Parish, by land-use, is crop farming to the North, dairy farming and poultry breeding to the South-Central, and forestry to the far South. These activities make the Parish a significant contributor to regional and national food security and contribute to carbon sequestration. The broadleaf woodlands to the south of the Parish are a major source of diverse habitats and species, and contribute to carbon capture.

These farming activities are supported by a farm machinery businesses (Yeandle’s) based at Smallbrooke, and a refrigeration, dairy and air conditioning company (Daw Refrigeration), based at Sweetham, both of which provide services across the Parish and the wider region.

Value-addition to agricultural production also plays a significant role. The Parish is the centre of the thriving and internationally renowned Quicke’s cheese making operation based on local milk production. This also supports a local cheese retail outlet. Two breweries (the Beer Engine and Hanlons Brewery) in the Parish also add value to agricultural produce through their nationally recognised beers.

In addition the Parish has a thriving hospitality sector and is well known in Mid-Devon as a culinary destination. The Beer Engine and Hanlons Brewery have their own breweries and restaurants, and Belluno’s is an Italian restaurant.

The Adoni Community Kitchen in the Parish Hall is a charitable trust with a socially oriented aim of providing low cost food for the many people who would like to eat out occasionally in the company of friends. The Kitchen operates on Tuesday and Wednesday each week and caters for around 30 guests. It is run entirely by volunteers.

The Recreation Ground also supports a clubroom used for local sports events, social activities, and weddings. All of these attract income from outside the Parish.

Box 14: Sustainable Poultry at Moon Ridge Farm



From: Moon Ridge Farm Webpage

The Parish also has a diverse network of public footpaths which are maintained by the Parish Council. They include part of the **Devonshire Heartland Way**. These pathways offer very popular country walks through the farmlands, which attract many visitors from Exeter, Crediton and beyond. These are essential to the Parish's hospitality sector.

The Parish Hall has a post office which operates one day a week. There is also a strong social care sector within the Parish with the care home in Langford providing specialist care for up to 35 residents.

Newton St Cyres Primary school provides employment for 27 teachers and support staff, and provides education for 147 children from 2-11 years, and runs a breakfast club and an afternoon club to cater for 'wraparound care'. It thus makes a significant contribution to the future economy. There is also a Muddy Boots Childcare facility located on Home farm which employs a number of people and caters for children from ages 4 months to 5 years.

In Half Moon village there is a car sales company (PR Cars) on the A377 which also carries out servicing and repair. Nearby is a park home with holiday homes (Nadine's Country Park). In Langford village there is also a camping and caravan site which brings additional tourists to the area. The Recreation Ground and Parish Hall also bring in many people who enjoy the leisure opportunities of the Parish and further contribute to the economy.

According to The National Statistics Office there is also a number of people who commute to work in Exeter and other urban centres where the University and business community provides employment. They depend upon good road and rail services to get to work. There are also some self-employed people within the wider area, and a number of home-workers (38% of the population in 2021). 8.9% of workers commute up to 5 kms, and 25.2% commute between 5-10 kms. The majority of those travelling to work do so by car.

19.3% of people working in Newton St Cyres are in higher managerial, administrative or professional positions. 21.4% are in lower managerial, administrative or professional positions. 14.6% work for small employers or are self employed. 9.3% are employed in caring, leisure or other services. 55.6% of the population are economically active and 42.2% are economically inactive. A large number (circa 25%) are retired people who contribute significantly to the local economy through pensions.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND ENERGY

The Parish has a Parish Hall located in Newton St Cyres village. Part of the hall is 100 year old with the other section added later. The hall is built of brick and cob with main room of 16m x 8m (and stage area of 5m x 8m) which is licensed for 200 people, and a Club Room of 9m x 6m licensed for 50 people. There is also a dressing room, a kitchen

and storage facilities, and disabled access and toilets. The hall also has a car park which has 43 spaces. The Parish Hall is owned by a charitable trust.

The Recreation Ground is located in Sweetham and is a regionally important facility which caters for football, cricket, tennis and archery. There is also a play area for children. The Recreation Club has a bar, kitchen, toilets and changing rooms and caters for skittles, darts and pool. The Recreation ground can also be used for Air Ambulance night landings. The Recreation Ground has a carpark and road side parking. The grounds are leased from the Church Commissioners.

Newton St Cyres has one church located in the village of Newton St Cyres. The church owns the adjacent graveyard. The church has recently undergone development of a performance and exhibition space. There is also a primary school (see above for details).

The Parish has 26 allotments, managed by the PC, which are on land owned by the Quicke family. Some of the allotments are worked by volunteers who provide food free of charge to the community. The Quicques also owns the Arboretum in Newton St Cyres village which is leased to the Parish.

The PC owns the village green which is located in the village of Newton St Cyres adjacent to the A377 road. The PC also owns a plot of land adjacent to the Arboretum which is currently used to encourage wildlife. The PC has three resilience sheds which store emergency equipment and signage. They are located at the Recreation Gound, the Parish Hall and in Smallbrook village. The PC owns two defibrillators, one at the Recreation Ground and one at Belluno restaurant on the A377. The PC also owns the two old telephone boxes, one in Sweetham, which is used as a book exchange, and one in Newton St Cyres village.

The main means of transport for the Parish is via the A377 road which runs from Crediton to Exeter. This has regular bus services in both directions. There is also a railway line from Crediton to Exeter and a railway station in Sweetham. There is very limited parking at the station, no bus connection and a limited train stopping service.

Traffic through Newton St Cyres Parish along the A377 has been increasing for many years. The steep drop into the village centre on the Exeter to Crediton road led to cuttings being made either side of the village in the 1830's to help horse-drawn vehicles. The road through the village centre was too narrow for buses and large lorries and a road widening scheme instituted in the late 1950s led to the demolition of many old houses.

The North part of the Parish is crossed by the road from Crediton to Langford and is linked to the A377 by two bridges one on Station Road and one at Langford. The Shuttern Brook in Newton St Cyres village has a ford and associated footbridge which is

a listed building. The bridge over the Creedy on Station Road is also a listed building. There is a footbridge over the Creedy near Half Moon Village.

The Parish Council has long championed a cycle path between Crediton and Exeter to avoid the back lanes, which are often overloaded with farm vehicles and delivery trucks, and the A377 with its congestion and pollution. This is still at the planning stage.

Most houses in the Parish are on mains sewage and there is a sewage treatment plant just off the A377 between Newton St Cyres and Half Moon village. The internet connection is fibreoptic to Newton St Cyres village but much of the rest of the Parish suffer from poor or expensive connectivity.

The households within the Parish use a wide diversity of energy sources including oil, gas, electricity, solar heating, air source heat pumps, and solar photovoltaics.

9. OPEN SPACES

A key contributor to the economy and leisure opportunities of the Parish is the diversity of open spaces.

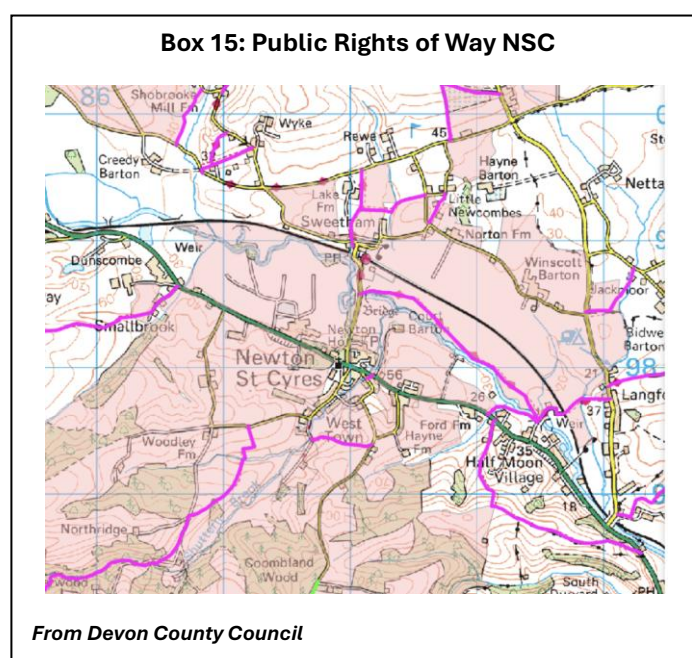
The Parish has the following key open spaces:

- The Village Green
- The Recreation Ground
- The Arboretum
- The River Creedy
- The network of public footpaths.

These all offer important opportunities for sport and recreation, and act as a visual amenity.

The Village Green is owned by the PC. It is located adjacent to the A377 road in the centre of Newton St Cyres village. It is an important feature of the centre of the NSC village and a central focus of local activities. It is a key point where many visitors start their exploration of the Parish as it is located by one of the main bus stops to and from Exeter and Crediton and near the Parish Hall carpark. The Village Green also contributes significantly to local biodiversity through the wild flower planting which also contributes to the nature corridor across the A377 from North to South.

The Recreation Ground is located in Sweetnam, South of the Railway Station. It has several football pitches, a cricket pitch, 2 tennis courts, a children's play area and an



area for Archery. The Recreation Ground is a major attraction for visitors to the Parish for both sport and wider social events.

The Arboretum is located adjacent to the church. It has many non-native tree specimens, large areas of open grass land, a network of paths and some seats and lookouts. Music and drama performances are put on at the Arboretum for the benefit of the community and the wider public.

The River Creedy runs through the Parish and is a significant attractant for visitors wishing to walk alongside it, observe the otters and fish from the banks. The Creedy is also a habitat for much of the biodiversity that lives in the Parish.

The network of public footpaths throughout the Parish (See Box 15) is a major attraction for visitors to the area who like to walk these paths, enjoy the countryside and visit local pubs and restaurants.

10. INSTITUTIONS

The main institution of government within the Parish is the PC. This has been in operation since 1894. It meets regularly every month in the Parish Hall and also holds monthly surgeries there.

Much of the day-to-day work of the PC is carried out by volunteer groups. There are around 100 volunteers in the Parish who regularly support the effective operation of community initiatives. The Flood Group was formed in 2014 and has developed a Community Resilience Plan and associated Action Cards. It operates the three resilience sheds in the Parish. The Road Wardens have been operational for a number of years and do much work to keep the drains clear, the potholes filled and the verges cut.

There is also an active Neighbourhood Watch Group, an Arboretum Group, a Railway Garden Group, a Speed Watch Group, Litter Pickers, and a Snow Wardens Group. The Newton Environment and Wellbeing (NEW) group carries out environmental activities including planting the village green with wildflowers, monitoring the River Creedy water quality, growing food for free distribution, hedge laying, tree planting and coppicing.

The Parish supports a large number of community groups and clubs including:

- Arts Group
- Luncheon Club
- Mah Jong Club
- Newton Ramblers
- Young Farmers
- Football club
- Cricket club
- Tennis club
- Archery
- Gardening Club
- Table Tennis
- Pre-school play group
- Friends of Newton School
- Friends of Newton Station

The Recreation Ground has a committee which supports the upkeep and operation of the club and grounds. The Parish Hall also has a committee which maintains and operates the Hall, takes bookings for events and in 2026 is organising a fund raising for renovation of the Hall. The Parish Church of St. Cyr and St. Julitta is in the rural Deanery of Cadbury and the Archdeaconry of Exeter and Diocese of Exeter. The Netherexe Parishes are a community of ten churches in the Diocese of Exeter.

The Parish also has a popular monthly magazine called the **Newton Wonder** which keeps the Parish informed of news and comment. Both the NSC-PC and the Newton Wonder have websites.

11. THE POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES

Policy formulation and development planning falls under the auspices of the Parish Council. This must be done within the wider framework of the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (both of which are undergoing revision at the time of writing).

The PC has a comprehensive list of policies (see Box 16) ranging from those dealing directly with how the PC operates, through complaints procedures, Standing Orders and financial regulations.

These are updated on a regular basis to reflect changes in the Parish and wider society.

In line with this the Parish Council has engaged in a number of planning and visioning activities which have tried to capture the needs and aspirations of the community. These include:

- The 2008 Newton St Cyres Parish Plan
- The 2015 Newton St Cyres Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
- The 2016 Parish Plan
- The 2022 Parish of Newton St Cyres Housing Needs Report
- The 2022-2024 Neighbourhood Planning process

These are outlined below:

Box 16: NSC-PC Policy Areas

- Climate Emergency
- Code of Conduct
- Co-option
- Community Engagement
- Complaints
- Digital and Social Media
- Equal Opportunities
- Filming and Recording of Council Meetings
- Financial Regulations
- Grant Giving
- Health and Safety
- Media Communication
- Powers of the Parish Council
- Privacy
- Publications
- Standing Orders
- Statement of Internal Control
- Training and Development
- Volunteers

2008 Newton St Cyres Parish Plan

In 2006 the Parish Council took the first steps towards the preparation of a Parish Plan. It invited all organisations to attend an open meeting and also placed an article in the Parish magazine inviting parishioners to attend. The open meeting was held in the Parish Hall on the 12th July 2007 and from that meeting a Steering Group was formed. This first met on the 21st August 2007 where members were present from most of the parish organisations.

A consultation event was held in November 2007 in the Parish Hall over a three-day period where parishioners were invited to put forward their ideas for the topics to be included in a questionnaire. During the winter of 2007/2008 the Steering Group, with help from Devon County Council finalised the questionnaire which was then trialled on a selected handful of parishioners. Following the input from this exercise the final questionnaire was produced and circulated to every household in the parish.

The response was exceptionally high with approximately **86% of eligible households** returning their completed questionnaire. Questionnaires were then analysed by Devon County Council who produced an analysis from which the 2008 Plan was developed.

The 2015 Newton St Cyres Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

The Newton St Cyres conservation area was first designated on 2nd October 1985. The conservation area and boundary were surveyed in the summer of 2014 by MDDC. Proposed changes to the boundary were considered by MDDC, following English Heritage guidance on conservation areas as well as assessing the appropriateness and collective attributes of all buildings and features in and around the conservation area. A consultation with the public in February and March 2015 was designed to ensure that any proposed boundary changes reflected the local community's views and suggestions. In total, 6 representations were received. The conservation area boundary was amended, and the appraisal and management plan document adopted by MDDC (MDDC, 2015. Newton St Cyres Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan).

The 2016 Parish Plan

The Newton St Cyres Parish Plan of 2016 was prepared by a Steering Group of the PC. As part of the planning process a Steering Group produced a questionnaire that was circulated to every household in the parish in early June 2015. Forms were returned from 202 households, some 55% of the total number of households in the Parish. There were 453 people in the responding households, compared with a total population in the 2011 Census of 866. The questionnaire provided an opportunity for parishioners to comment on all aspects of parish life and, in particular, to express their views on how the Parish should develop in the future. The findings from the questionnaire were then converted into an Action Plan which provided a framework for the future planning for the

Parish based on the views of the parishioners. It was designed to advise statutory bodies on where their best efforts should be directed for the benefit of the whole community.

The 2022 Parish of Newton St Cyres Housing Needs Report

The 2022 housing needs report was commissioned by MDDC in conjunction with Newton St Cyres Parish Council to assess future local housing need to support the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Survey was implemented by Devon Communities Together. 417 survey forms were sent out, one to every household in the Parish. 104 surveys were returned, which was a response rate of 25% of all dwellings surveyed. The survey achieved its aim of identifying actual households in need and identified future housing requirements.

The 2022-2024 Neighbourhood Planning process

The Neighbourhood Planning process was commissioned by the PC in 2022 and was implemented by a Steering Group of parishioners. The Steering Group was supported by inputs from a consultant. During the process one major consultation took place to gain an understanding of the priorities of the wider community and a consultation with children at the local primary school (July 2023). The school consultation generated 91 written responses and notes were also taken from live discussions. The age range of the participants was from 6-11 years of age.

This wider consultation involved a presentation in the Parish Hall in February 2023. A further presentation was made at the Annual Parish meeting in 2024 to announce that, due to issues concerning uncertainties around the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Planning Process would be discontinued.

12. COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

The Community Planning Framework identifies the priorities of the residents of the Parish of Newton St Cyres as expressed during a variety of consultation exercises over recent years. These are described below.

2008 Newton St Cyres Parish Plan

The 2008 Plan identified a clear vision for the future of the Parish:

- The need to **keep the rural character of the Parish** with only limited development of new housing and this being principally by sensitive infill.
- The need to **address traffic problems**, to maintain good public transport facilities and to improve facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, with aspiration for the provision of cycle and walkways through the Parish between Exeter and Crediton.

- The need to maintain and enhance the Parish environment with **maintenance of the Conservation Area** and actions to protect the visual landscape, to increase **renewable energy production** and to **reduce problems from litter and dog fouling**.
- There was concern expressed that the present population was ageing, there was identified a need for actions: (a) to improve the **opportunities and facilities for young families**, including direction of **new housing to the affordable sector**, and (b) to cater fully for the needs of the large proportion of **older people in the Parish**.
- The need to **maintain and enhance parish facilities and services**. The Parish was considered fortunate to have a School, Church, Post Office, Shop, Public Houses, a Recreation Ground and Parish Hall. These were key facilities that were much used by parishioners and others in the locality and it was felt that these would provide the foci for additional activities suggested in the Survey.

Overall, the Plan recognised the value of the rural nature of the Parish and the need to keep it as a rural community. The questionnaire responses indicated very clearly that parishioners attached great importance to the visual landscape with 82% indicating it is very important and a further 16% that it is quite important. Several comments in the Survey of Businesses and Organisations commented on the importance to them of the beautiful area within which they are located and comments in the questionnaire referred to the good fortune of living in a very beautiful area.

77% of respondents to the Plan questionnaire thought the Parish **should not become part of an expanded Exeter** and only 3% thought this was a good idea. Several comments expressed very strong views on this issue.

As regards future developments within the Parish, the Plan indicates that a third of those responding were happy with the Parish as it was and 54% indicating that any development should allow the Parish **to grow as a mixed community**, implying the need for a balance in age structure and in social classes. There was virtually no support for development as a retirement community (1%) or a commuter community (2%).

Whilst 35% of people did not want to see any development, some people saw possibilities for housing development in the Parish. It was significant that 11 people offered the comment that the development should be by sensitive infill, rather than new estates and others stressed the need to keep a largely **green area between Exeter and Crediton**. There was considerable variation in opinion with 24% wanting no housing development at all, 24% up to 10 houses, 36% 10-20 houses and 16% more than 20 houses. The Plan identified that **small developments, particularly for affordable housing**, should be the way forward.

The 2015 Newton St Cyres Conservation Area Appraisal and Management

The Conservation Area Management Plan was written in 1985 and in upgraded in 2015. It was prepared by MDDC and a public consultation regarding the boundary was carried out in 2015 and it was agreed that the area would be expanded to the new boundaries shown in the plan. No priorities were identified by the public during this consultation.

The 2016 Parish Plan

The 2016 Plan reiterated many of the points identified in the 2008 Plan and acknowledged that some of the requirements of the 2008 Plan had been achieved in the interim. Key was the general desire to maintain the **rural nature of the community** and its unique landscape but to **increase opportunities for younger people**. Respondents generally had a strong feeling of belonging to a **village community**. Several features were considered to make the location a **special place**. The most selected feature was **‘Distinctive landscape, view and scenery’** with 78%, followed by ‘Woodland’ (56%), ‘Distinctive, traditional building styles’ (48%), ‘Country lanes’ (48%), ‘Tranquillity’ (45%), ‘Traditional farming practices’ (43%), ‘Biodiversity’ (31%), ‘Character of village centres and settlements’ (29%) and ‘dark skies’ (14%).

Limited housing was needed especially for low cost, smaller houses to both increase the opportunities for young families and for older people to downsize. Strong support was indicated for **more affordable houses** in the parish (50% of respondents supported this compared with 20% who did not). Overall 89% of respondents wanted the balance in the parish to remain the same. There were, however, 13 comments on the need for more younger people in the Parish.

Traffic problems were identified, particularly road safety and congestion. The need for **a cycle track** from Crediton to Exeter, identified in the 2008 Plan, was re-emphasised. The main means of **transport** in the Parish was identified as private car with bus services second. A very small number of people wanted more stopping trains. Poor **broadband and mobile phone** coverage were considered as significant problems. There was also a desire to see **parish facilities and services** improved. **Footpaths** were identified as a well-used area of open space in the Parish and the need for these to be enhanced was emphasised. There was also considerable interest expressed in **renewable energy production systems, improving biodiversity** through tree planting and **bulk waste collection**. The **community aspects** of the Parish were much appreciated, especially community support and volunteer initiatives. A large proportion of the respondents do voluntary work and 34% would consider doing voluntary work if approached.

The 2022 Parish of Newton St Cyres Housing Needs Report

The survey found 5 households in housing need who could not afford to buy or rent in the open market. They required 2-3 bedroom houses. 71% (68 responses) of those who answered the Housing Needs Questionnaire said they would be in favour of a **small development of affordable housing for local people** and 29% (28 respondents) were against. The older persons' survey part of the study showed that the majority of households, 63 (78 %), had no plans to move home. However, the Parish did have a number of older households who wished to downsize to smaller accommodation that was easier to maintain, had lower running costs and was close to amenities and support.

The 2022-2024 Neighbourhood Planning process

The consultation with the children of **Newton St Cyres Primary School** generated a wide diversity of priorities particularly those related the installation of electric vehicle charging points, improved bus and train services, more child sensitive footpaths, a cycle path and bicycle parking areas. They also wanted better play equipment in the Parish for older children. There was also considerable emphasis on the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and support for greater biodiversity. The children considered eco-friendly housing as important and the need for a mix of housing. As regards the local economy they wanted a shop selling fruit and vegetables amongst other things, a café, a newsagents and a pharmacy.

The **Consultation with the general public** in February 2023 generated the following aspirations from the community in the following areas:

Open Spaces and Leisure. The Arboretum was highlighted as a key asset that people wanted further developed for public use. Both the Recreation Ground and Parish Hall were also noted as important assets, especially the Parish Hall which people felt needed improvement. It was also mentioned that, because the Parish is dispersed, **more of such facilities might be built** in places such as Langford and Half Moon. There was also interest in making Glebe field in Newton St Cyres village into an area for children to play.

The network of pathways across the Parish was much appreciated and there was interest in expanding these into areas beside roads where pavements are absent. Developing the banks of the River Creedy as an open space for public use was also raised.

Climate and the Environment. The priorities identified were for accessible green spaces to enhance biodiversity and for flood alleviation projects. Community energy initiatives were also identified. The River Creedy was seen as both a means of flood alleviation and for biodiversity. There was also emphasis on the better management of

woodlands, allotments, hedgerows, orchards and land more generally to enhance biodiversity. A move to more environmentally sustainable means of travel was also seen as a key.

Public Open Spaces. Open spaces were considered as vital for biodiversity, exercise, social interaction and for conservation more generally. Flood defence and prevention was seen as important to this as was the improved water quality in the Creedy.

Whilst community energy production was considered important it was also pointed out that this needed to be practically and financially viable.

Footpaths and cycleways were considered very important.

The Local Economy. It was considered that the development of the local economy should be done so in ways that are compatible with the rurality of the area, and that development should work in conjunction with local farming and forestry. Inappropriate housing developments should be discouraged.

Priority support should be given to conserving and developing existing services such as the pubs, restaurants, cheese shop, post office and local community groups.

New businesses should be encouraged by offering space in existing facilities. Proposed additions to the economy included a shop, café and work hub alongside businesses in keeping with the local environment. Improvements in internet speeds and mobile capacity were considered essential.

Transport and Infrastructure. It was felt that the bus and rail services need further development and that a new cycle and footpath route between Crediton and Exeter was essential. Traffic management on the A377 was important to enhance the quality of life of people in the locality. A footpath between Newton St Cyres village and Sweetham, linked to the development of the Crediton to Exeter cycle and foot-path, was identified.

Housing. The general consensus was for a good mix of housing types but no large developments and to maintain the low density of housing in the Parish. All new houses should, ideally be energy efficient and affordable. There should be no building in the flood plain.

Health and Wellbeing. It was considered important to maintain the countryside access, particularly to places like the Arboretum and the footpaths, and to enhance the sense of community spirit through clubs, the pub, the Adonai Kitchen, the Newton Wonder and the Church.

The changes that people wanted included reducing the traffic volume and speed, greater involvement of the young in community activities and the Crediton to Exeter cycleway.

The Updated 2026 PC Policies

Of the 19 policies of the NSC-PC, there are two in particular which point to the future direction of the Parish. These are the **Community Engagement Policy** and the **Climate Emergency Policy**.

The **Community Engagement Policy** states the following vision for the Parish:

- A parish that protects the outstandingly beautiful environment in which it is situated but is brave enough to embrace the best of what the modern world has to offer.
- A lifestyle that benefits from improving the living standards of its people.
- A community that enjoys a safe, secure and healthy way of life.
- A caring community that provides for all its age groups.
- A community that takes every opportunity to help itself.
- In the face of changes to the traditional industries of tourism and agriculture an outward looking community adopting new activities to sustain the economic viability of the area.

This policy provides a focus for all engagement activities, policies and processes to align with the council's objectives to create an improved quality of life by working with people and partners, devolving decision-making and empowering individuals and communities to contribute and influence services.

The **Climate Emergency Policy** guides the PC to do the following:

- Taking action to reduce our carbon footprint, as declaring a Climate emergency justifies a cross cutting approach to all decisions taken by the Parish Council.
- Improving our environment and biodiversity for assets directly under the Parish Council's control and by engaging with and providing support to the community, local organisations and landowners to take similar action.
- Taking action to prepare our community for the adaptations and mitigations necessary that Climate Change will bring to our way of life through a community engagement policy and action plan.
- Providing feedback on wider council strategies on housing, transport and energy as they relate to this Parish and specific feedback on local planning applications in relation to Climate Change issues.
- Collaborating with other District and Parish councils to learn from their experiences and to attract potential funding for Parish initiatives.

13. COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

An analysis of past community policy, planning initiatives and consultations indicates a range of community priorities for development of the Parish which can be summarised as follows:

1. That the special **rural nature** and historic characteristics of the Parish be protected.
2. That the Parish remains a **green area between Exeter and Crediton** and not a part of broader Exeter.
3. That the **conservation and enhancement** of the environment be extended, promoted and supported to increase and sustain ecosystem and species diversity.
4. That a small number (in proportion to the existing housing number and density) of energy efficient, predominantly (but not exclusively) two or three bedroom **houses**, be added to the community in infill areas and in sensitive ways that enhance the rural nature of the Parish.
5. That all future developments within the Parish should acknowledge the importance of the River Creedy floodplain, the **sensitivity of the Parish to flooding** from the river and from surface run-off, and the role the floodplain plays in downstream protection.
6. That the **open spaces of the Parish** (particularly the Arboretum, the recreation ground, the River Creedy and network of pathways), being vital resources for quality of life of the residents, for the environmental services they deliver, and for attracting the many visitors needed to sustain the local economy, be preserved, enhanced and developed.
7. That facilities in the Parish, such as the **Parish Hall, Arboretum and Recreation Ground** are supported to improve the type and quality of the services they deliver for the community and visitors, including where possible an expansion of those facilities into new areas of the Parish, and to address the needs of both children and older residents.
8. That the **A377 traffic congestion, access and speed** issues be reduced, and that **safety for pedestrians** along all parts of the A377, Station Road and other roads be improved, especially around the school.
9. That **sustainable transport links** (bus and train) between the Parish and Crediton and Exeter be improved and that a **cycleway and footpath** be developed between Crediton and Exeter.
10. That **existing businesses in the community** (including agriculture) be supported to be more successful in the long-term and more biologically sustainable, and that additional businesses should be encouraged, including renewable energy generation, where they complement existing businesses and the rurality of the Parish.
11. That communications, specifically **broadband and mobile phone**, coverage be improved throughout the Parish.

12. That the **community spirit**, exemplified by community support and volunteering, be promoted, supported and enhanced.

14. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPMENT

In implementing these priorities, the Parish has a number of opportunities but also faces a number of challenges. These are broadly outlined below.

Opportunities

The geology of the Parish has provided it with one of its greatest assets: **very high quality soil**. This has sustained farming over the centuries and makes Newton St Cyres a very productive **contributor to national food security**. The Devon Redlands, in a large part of the Parish, are classified as the **best and most versatile (BMV) land** in the country by Natural England. These lands are mainly Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Grade 1 and 2. Such BMV lands have a major role to play in achieving the **sustainable development** of the country through diverse food production, and **agricultural and rural development**.

This very high quality agricultural land and rurality of the Parish has the potential to:

- a) **Enhance rural agricultural production and food security.**
- b) **Enable expansion of economic activities of the Parish, especially in areas such as secondary industries** such as cheese and beer production.
- c) **Promote greater visitor numbers to the Parish** that support and **enhance the local recreation and hospitality sectors** and provides a valuable and **healthy resource** for the Parish, and for both Exeter and Crediton.
- d) **Conserve nature and enhance biodiversity** through improved production practices already ongoing in the Parish, and habitat restoration.

Those areas of the Parish where land is less valuable for food production (i.e. not BMV land), recreation and for biodiversity, have the potential **for small business development** and for some **smaller energy efficient housing**. Such housing would be of great benefit to less well-off members of the community, younger families and for downsizing elderly households. This would need to be done in ways that **do not detract from the rural quality and beauty of the Parish** and thus adversely affect the visitor numbers needed by the recreation and hospitality sectors. Such development would also need to be done in ways that **do not contribute to further transport problems, do not place increased pressure on basic infrastructure such as water supplies and sewage treatment**, and is developed at a slow enough pace to allow the new residents to be **socially accommodated by the Parish**. Housing development should also allow for adequate biodiversity corridors between groups of houses.

The farming, hospitality and recreation sectors have the potential for **small-scale commercial growth** in the Parish especially in complementary industries, on non-farm

land and in infill sites. This needs to be done in ways that enhance the environmental sustainability of farming and contributes to improved biodiversity and habitat quality.

The recreation and hospitality sectors would be further enhanced through the development of **a cycle and footpath from Crediton to Exeter** that avoids the back roads and the A377. The proposed changes to the Crediton to Exeter rail line could be an opportunity to develop the cycle path in conjunction with the rail improvements.

The **rail services** that pass through the village have the further potential to reduce congestion, pollution and danger on the A377. There has been recent discussion around the development of Crediton railway station as a **rail park-and-ride facility**. This could be a significant step towards reducing road traffic through the Parish. The railway station in the Parish has limited capacity for expansion with no parking and poor road access.

The transport issues could be further reduced through **better signage and speed restrictions around the school, a footpath down Station Road, traffic calming of the A377** in Newton St Cyres village, **a pedestrian crossing over the A377** from Tytheing Close to Newton View and a **footpath from Hanlons Brewery** to the bus stop at Half Moon.

There is also a fine balance to be achieved between sensitive development and the **potential for increased flood risk** from surface water run-off. The hydrology of the Parish provides a **major sink for flood waters** from upstream and from surface run-off in the Parish. This reduces the adverse effects of flooding downstream in Exeter. This is an **environmental service** which will take on a much more significant role as climate change progresses. Any future development in the Parish needs to take into account any further contribution to run-off and its affects on: 1) the viability existing farm land, 2) existing settlements, especially around the Shuttern Rapid Response Catchment, and 3) the downstream effects of communities in Half Moon, Cowley and Exeter.

The **economic and social viability** of the current community is strong, in part, because of the institutions and community spirit in the Parish. In addition to building the resilience of the key commercial producers of the Parish, the viability of the Parish can be further enhanced by **greater security of the land tenure of the Recreation Ground** and through **enhanced capacity and service provision by the Parish Hall**. The celebration of 100 years of the Parish Hall also offers the potential for the Hall to be better adapted to the changing needs of the wider community. Housing development which occurs at a pace which allows the existing community structures and processes to adapt to change and accommodate population increase is essential.

The natural landscape of the Redlands provides a **significant store of habitat and species diversity** which is essential to wider crop production and to protection of the natural environment. This River Creedy and associated streams can enhance this

diversity if the water quality is improved. Also tree planting, habitat restoration, and improved support to the farming community to adopt better practices, such as pollution reduction and field edge buffer zones, can be expanded through closer engagement with farmers.

This landscape also contributes to the open spaces in the Parish which are considered vital to the quality of life by the residents and visitors alike. **The protection and enhancement of open spaces** such as the Arboretum, the Recreation Ground, the network of footpaths and the River Creedy, would enhance the quality of life of the residents and attract more visitors which would have positive knock-on effects on local businesses. The area along the River Creedy has considerable potential for development as a key visitor resource, and place to visit. Habitat creation and restoration (including tree planting) along the river banks can increase biodiversity, reduce flooding and damage to farm land, and enhance the wellbeing and health of both visitors and the local community.

Challenges

Whilst the Parish has the potential to achieve sustainable development which is of benefit to both the local community, the wider community and the national economy by taking up the opportunities outlined above, it will face some very significant challenges over the coming years.

The current Central Government has proposed a plan which includes introducing mandatory planning targets to aim **to build 1.5 million new homes** in the UK over the next five years. As part of this plan, the Government has updated the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** to bring back mandatory housing targets and set a higher expectation for how many homes must be built. The new targets aim to boost housebuilding in areas most in need, to help more people buy their own homes, and help drive growth.

In addition to this, Local Government has recently been through a **Local Government Reorganisation** which is removing Newton St Cyres Parish from the authority of Mid Devon District Council and placing it under a, yet to be formed, **Exeter Unitary Authority**. In the proposal to create the Exeter Unitary Authority the growth of housing and economic development were identified as major drivers.

Both the Central Government's housing targets and the move of NSC to the Exeter Unitary Authority are likely to generate pressures for increased housing in the Parish. The formation of the new unitary authority is scheduled to be complete by April 2028. In the meantime MDDC is preparing a new Local Plan which is designed to assist the transition to the Local Government Reorganisation. Newton St Cyres is included in that plan. As part of the MDDC planning process, MDDC has produced a **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)**. This identifies land that is

“suitable, available and achievable” for development over coming years ([Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#)). **HELAA identifies some 640 potential locations for houses in NSC** mainly to the east of Station road stretching east towards Half Moon village. There are also two sites either side of the A377 in Half Moon, and one site to the West of West Town Road in Newton St Cyres village. These identified sites will be used as evidence to inform MDDC’s Local Plan. Whilst they may not all enter the Local Plan, those that do have a good chance of being proposed for development.

Given that the Parish currently has around 420 houses, proposing an additional 640 houses to a rural farming community would clearly be unacceptable and unachievable without destroying the character of the Parish, overloading infrastructure, compromising the environment, threatening the local economy and increasing the risk of serious flooding.

Whilst the Parish Council recognises the need for increased housing nationally and locally it is also aware of the priorities of the local community and the importance of protecting the social, economic, physical and natural environment of the Parish.

The level and location of housing envisaged by HELAA conflicts directly with the priorities identified by the community as identified in this document.

Conserving the Best and Most Versatile Land

The Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land in England is a scarce and vital national resource which should be preserved for the food security of current and future generations. In England, agricultural land of **Grade 1 makes up 2.7%** of all farmland, and **Grade 2 accounts for 18%**. All BMV land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) make up 42% of farmland. Local authorities are advised to avoid developing on it unless there are exceptional circumstance. In Devon generally BMV is in scarce supply and is threatened by a number of pressures:

- Urban expansion taking over good farming land for housing,
- Solar farm development is also growing and taking over BMV land,
- Climate change which threatens to increase soil erosion and flooding of agricultural land, especially from surface run-off from developed land.

Of the 48.72ha of land identified in HELAA for development in NSC, 30.77 ha is **Grade 2 (63%)** and 17.95ha is **Grade 3 (37%)**. The HELAA does not distinguish between Grade 3a and 3b.

The Central Government recognises the importance of BMV agricultural land and the NPPF (2026) says this under policy N2b: “**Take into account the quality of agricultural land (including that classified as best and most versatile, and its grade), and if**

significant development of agricultural land is necessary, use areas of poorer quality land where possible.”

Furthermore, the NPPF (2026) says that local plans should be consistent with national policy and should: ***“accord with the policies for plan-making in this framework and other statements of national planning policy where relevant, and does not include policies which...are inconsistent with the content of national policies for decision-making...” (NFFP, 2026, Policy PM15d).***

Reference to other policies aims to protect:

- the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land from significant, inappropriate or unsustainable development proposals,
- all soils by managing them in a sustainable way.

Natural England, as a statutory consultee in the planning process, identifies the following policy documents as key to providing advice on development proposals:

1. A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to improve the Environment 2018

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment sets out the government’s 25-year plan to improve the health of the environment by using natural resources more sustainably and efficiently. It plans to:

- protect the best agricultural land
- put a value on soils as part of our natural capital
- manage soils in a sustainable way by 2030
- restore and protect peatland

2. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2026

LPAs should use the NPPF to make decisions about the natural and local environment to:

- protect and enhance landscapes, biodiversity, geology and soils
- recognise soils as a natural capital asset that provide important ecosystem services
- consider the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land, and try to use areas of poorer quality land instead of higher quality land
- prevent soil, air, water, or noise pollution, or land instability from new and existing development

3. Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment

Paragraphs 001 and 002 of the Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment explain why planning decisions should take account of the value of soils and agricultural land classification (ALC) to enable informed choices on the future use of agricultural land within the planning system.

4. The Land Use Framework 2026

The Government's Land Use Framework (2026) states that we need to strategically conserve the agricultural land with the greatest long-term potential for food production, although some BMV land may go to habitat restoration to enhance water quality, flood reduction and pollination services.

One of the key principles of the Land Use Framework states that land use should be planned and managed to deliver greater benefits across a range of outcomes, **tailored to local priorities and opportunities, society needs and environmental pressures.**

MDDC echoes these requirements. In its Plan Mid Devon 2023 - 2043 Regulation 18 Issues Paper January 2022 – MDDC states:

*Mid Devon is predominantly rural, with the majority of the total land area being in agricultural use. Nationally, the best and most versatile agricultural land includes land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification. **The majority of the district's agricultural land is in Grade 3** (65% of all the agricultural land), **with 11% classed Grade 2 and 4% classed as the highest quality (Grade 1).** Less than 46 hectares of agricultural land is deemed of the lowest quality, 0.1% of the total. National Planning Policy makes clear that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, and recognise the **economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.** Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality. However, it is recognised that poorer quality land can still have an important role in supporting farming, such as where grassland is used for producing silage (my emphasis).*

is clear from the NPPF and the wider policy framework that housing development on BMV land would adversely affect a scarce national resource in an irretrievable manner and should be avoided. BMV land is part of our natural heritage and is crucial for future food security, it will become more important as climate change increases. Building houses on BMV land irreversibly damages the land and takes it permanently out of agricultural use.

The inclusion of BMV land, identified in HELAA, in the Local Plan would clearly conflict with the current NPPF's policies for the protection of soils, natural capital and BMV

agricultural land. In addition the HELAA process has failed to demonstrate why development needs to take place on this highest-quality agricultural resource when the national policy approach is to prefer poorer-quality agricultural land where agricultural land is required. A general requirement to deliver additional housing does not, of itself, establish that this particular agricultural resource must be sacrificed. **Policy N2** of the NPPF 2026 establishes a national policy preference against using higher-quality agricultural land where poorer-quality agricultural land can accommodate the necessary development. Given that most of the available land in Mid Devon is not BMV land it would seem to make the use of BMV land redundant.

Flood Protection

Much of the land proposed for development in the HELAA for NSC is also adjacent to the Shuttern Brook or on the slopes leading to the River Creedy.

Flash flooding is often associated with surface water flooding, when drains are unable to cope with heavy rainfall. Flash flooding can also occur from watercourses which are very responsive to heavy rainfall. These watercourses are within drainage areas called **‘Rapid Response Catchments’** and are at risk from responding extremely quickly to heavy rainfall. Often this is due to steep valley slopes or in urban areas where water runs off the land straight into the river. As noted above Shuttern Brook is a **Rapid Response Catchment Area designated by the Environment agency**. The Shuttern runs through the centre of Newton St Cyres village, in close proximity to numerous historic houses within the Conservation Area, under the A377 road, past Beluno’s restaurant, past the new housing development at Kingfisher Close and adjacent to the Primary School. All of these are potentially under threat from an increased risk of flooding from additional housing South of the A377.

Increased development on the slopes either North or South of the River Creedy has the potential to increase flooding both within the Creedy valley and further downstream towards Exeter. Runoff into the River Creedy already causes soil erosion and damages crops in the fields adjacent to the river, especially on the North side. Further run-off will exacerbate these issues. This is already likely to increase as a result of housing development close to the flood plan in Crediton.

Increased flood water in the Creedy floodplain also threaten the Recreation Ground which has been subject to flooding in the past. The Recreation Ground is a major community asset which needs to be protected.

Increased flood water is further likely to impact the communities down stream from Newton St Cyres Village. Parts of Half Moon village already suffer from flood issues which are likely to increase with more housing upstream. Cowley village also suffered severe flooding in 2026 and this will likely be more frequent with additional housing

upstream. The Creedy floodplain also provides a value break on the flood potential for Exeter, overloading this is likely to create flood issues in Exeter.

Building additional houses in both the Shuttern Valley and on the slopes of the River Creedy pose significant flood risk threats, these proposals contravene NPPF (2026) policies **F2** regarding the safe guarding of land needed for flood management, and **F6**, regarding high risk of flooding. The risk of settlement damage downstream of NSC is likely to be significantly increased.

Infrastructure

As is noted above, any large increase in housing development would have adverse effects on existing infrastructure. Much of the proposed development in HELAA is centred on Station Road which has major access issues with the A377 to the south and the 16th Century Grade II listed Lower Creedy Bridge to the North, as noted in the HELAA report. Access through Langford village is similarly constrained. The exit from Station Road to the A377 is through a narrow passage between housing and rock cliff edge. The exit is already hazardous and would not easily allow further traffic flow.

The road to the North crosses the Lower Creedy bridge which is a single lane and has limited passing space on either side. This is also a bridge used by pedestrians particularly by children walking to and from the Primary School. Furthermore, there is no footpath access to railway station at Sweetham.

The sewage system in NSC is also a significant constraint to development, as noted in HELAA. The existing population and businesses of the Parish consumes much of the current waste water handling capacity through infiltration, commercial flows, rainfall run-off, peak flows and regular domestic use. A large number of additional houses concentrated in one area such as that considered in HELAA around Station Road would require extensive upgrading of the sewage system.

15. The NSC Parish Council's Response to the Ongoing Local Planning Process.

This Community Planning Framework is designed to encourage and support a process of **sustainable development** which builds on local community priorities and strengths, at the same time as achieving national goals for development as outlined by the NPPF. The Parish Council and the community of Newton St Cyres recognise the need for housing and economic development but do not think that this should be implemented at the expense of the national heritage, food security, and the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Parish.

In conclusion, the Parish Council proposes that the Local Planning Authorities in their plans for housing and economic development within the Parish follow the provisions of

the NPPF and other Government policy document as outlined above, and more specifically that they:

1. Take into account of the **NSC community priorities**, as outlined above, in the Local Plan process as recognised in NPPF (2026) policy PM5ⁱ: *by identifying and addressing community priorities that can be met or supported through the planning system.*
2. Exclude the Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land from housing and economic development in line with NPPF (2026) policy N2, **and identify non-BMV land in the Parish and elsewhere for staged housing development in line with local need and the local capacity to absorb that development.**
3. Do not, through inappropriate development, undermine the **environmental flood management** role that the Creedy Floodplain plays in protecting both the Parish and communities downstream from extreme flood effects, and fully recognise the additional threat that the **Shuttern Rapid Response Catchment** poses, in line with NPPF (2026) policies F2 and F6.
4. Recognise the limitations of current road and waste management infrastructure, to handle a substantial increase in housing, especially associated with Station Road, and to gradually improve infrastructure in the Parish in advance of housing and economic development.

ⁱ Whilst the NPPF policy F5 states that *Neighbourhood plans allow local communities to plan positively for their areas by identifying and addressing community priorities that can be met or supported through the planning system*, implicit in this is that local community priorities, however defined, have a *de facto* role in Local Planning.