

URBAN RENEWAL IN DEVON TOWNS

# Okehampton Regeneration Strategy

March 2023





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## Document control

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## 1 Introduction

1.1 Devon County Council, working with West Devon Borough Council and Hardisty Jones Associates (HJA) are delivering an Urban Renewal programme for Devon's towns, including Okehampton.

### Background

1.2 Previous work on market and coastal towns in Devon comprised an initial review of the challenges and opportunities towns face, identified the highest priority towns for support, and set out proposals for their regeneration and structural change in response to both long-standing issues and the more recent challenges caused by issues such as Covid-19 and Brexit. Devon County Council's objectives for the future of Devon's Towns include:

- A clear and locally owned vision and action plan for each town
- Attractive places to live, work and play
- Learning, training, and employment opportunities
- Digitally and physically accessible
- Good quality high streets and town centres
- Supporting remote working for those employed elsewhere
- Employment space for businesses at all stages of life
- Provision of affordable housing
- Environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive growth
- Giving investors and funders the confidence to invest in towns

1.3 This project is about developing practical and pragmatic plans and business cases to deliver transformational change in eight pilot towns, including Okehampton.

1.4 The approach to the urban renewal programme includes:

- Establishing a strategic regeneration board, in this case working with West Devon Borough Council and local stakeholders
- Preparing a Regeneration Strategy, i.e. this document
- Preparing a Business Case for a priority project
- Implementing quick win projects

## Regeneration Board

1.5 The Okehampton Regeneration Board has an advisory, not statutory role. It will shape and guide the future regeneration of the town, setting out the objectives and direction for the future of the town, with a view to increasing inward investment. It will advise the Borough and County Council along with other investors and funders about the town's challenges and opportunities, to inform their local activity and investment.

1.6 The Board represents the town, including its residents, Okehampton Town Council, Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council, businesses, and local institutions. It also includes the stakeholders who will help deliver support for future economic growth (i.e. the District and County Councils).

## Funding Opportunities

1.7 The primary role of the Board is to identify the needs and potential projects for strategic regeneration in Okehampton. However, the Board should maintain an overview of funding opportunities and should continue to liaise with West Devon Borough Council and Devon County Council on potential sources of funding for projects.

## Regeneration Strategy

1.8 This document is the regeneration strategy for Okehampton.

1.9 The regeneration strategy sets out the objectives for the future growth of Okehampton. Projects have been identified by the Regeneration Board that align with these strategic objectives and are prioritised, based on how well they contribute to achieving the objectives, their affordability, and how manageable they are. Based on these criteria, quick win projects have been identified, and a Business Case prepared for a more significant project.

1.10 Analysis of the socio-economic and policy evidence base which identifies the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and barriers for transformational change in Okehampton is included in Appendix One.

## 2 Vision and Objectives

### Vision

2.1 The latest draft of the Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan<sup>1</sup> sets out the following vision for the future of Okehampton:

*For Okehampton Town and Hamlets to thrive we need sustainable development. The historic market town of Okehampton has spilled over into the isolated farming communities of the Hamlets through housing development which has not been matched by the infrastructure and services which are needed. Recognising that Okehampton Town and Hamlets will increase in population in the next few years, both through developments which are already approved and those which will be required in the future, this Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan sets out a range of policies which, together, will ensure the current and future wellbeing of residents, businesses and visitors, and help to bring about a more sustainable outcome for Okehampton Town and Hamlets.*

### Objectives

2.2 A set of objectives for the future regeneration of Okehampton have been identified through consultations with the Okehampton Regeneration Board. These objectives are broadly aligned with regeneration related objectives identified in the latest draft of the Okehampton Neighbourhood Plan<sup>2</sup>. They are:

- More extensive and strategic marketing of Okehampton as a place to visit for access to Dartmoor, and as a strategic central location, i.e. access to National Park, countryside, and both coasts, leading to development of the town as a hub to service these opportunities
- Increase employment in the town, through creating and promoting local employment opportunities and connecting new residents with local jobs
- Harness opportunities created through Okehampton Train Station and the planned West Devon Transport Hub

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<sup>1</sup> Okehampton Town Council, Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council (2023). Post Regulation 14 Okehampton Town & Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan 2021 – 2034

<sup>2</sup> summaries of the Dartmoor Neighbourhood Plan and Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan are included in Appendix One: Context

### 3 Challenges and barriers

3.1 The following barriers and challenges have been identified through the baseline data review and policy review in Appendix One, and consultations with Okehampton Regeneration Board, which includes representatives of the Town, Hamlets, and Borough Councils, local businesses, community groups, charities and schools.

#### Declining employment

3.1 Although Okehampton is a service centre to a wide rural hinterland, it could be a stronger employment location. Many residents travel elsewhere to work in places such as Exeter, and as the city has experienced rapid growth in recent years rural towns like Okehampton have seen falling employment. This is leading to businesses in Okehampton reporting difficulties recruiting employees with the right skills<sup>3</sup>. The issue of seasonality is also seen as a challenge in Okehampton, with some employers in the hospitality and tourism sectors struggling to convert summer jobs into year round jobs. The post-16 offer for school leavers is seen as limited, with many young people leaving the town to access high-quality employment and career progression opportunities elsewhere. It is noted that although the town has seen a decline in employment in recent years, the quality of employment in Okehampton remains high.

#### Traffic congestion and poor infrastructure

3.2 The arrangement of roads in the town centre cause congestion, which is seen as a constraint to growth in Okehampton. Congestion is predominantly caused by supermarket shoppers and school traffic which backs up through the town centre, and on occasion by diverted traffic when the A30 is closed. It is perceived that town centre congestion deters visitors, including those living on the edge of the town and in the hamlets. There have been calls for an inner relief road around the town to help resolve this issue.

#### Town centre footfall

3.3 The town centre generally attracts low footfall, despite low numbers of empty units and a strong mix of independent and national retailers. More could be made of the two main shopping areas; the Red Lion Yard and Victorian Arcade, as they are not obvious attractions to first time visitors.

3.4 Small independent retailers, having previously survived multiple lockdowns throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, are now facing further challenges arising from the cost-of-living crisis and increasing energy prices. This has heightened the risk of closures and reduced opening hours in the town centre.

#### Lack of coordination of businesses

3.5 Okehampton lacks a unified business community, and poor relationships between some groups of businesses and town stakeholders have resulted in a lack of common purpose for the future of the town. After the recent closure of the Okehampton Chamber of Trade, the largest remaining business group is the Okehampton Area Business Owners, but this is not formally

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1: Context for evidence of falling employment and net out-commuting.

recognised by the Town Council. West Devon Bourgh Council is investigating the feasibility of setting up a Business Improvement District (BID) to help improve cohesion within the local business community<sup>4</sup>.

## Accessibility

3.6 The rurality of the surrounding hamlets to Okehampton means there are few travel options to get into the town, so many rely on the use of a car. The proposed new West Devon Transport Hub may bring increased connectivity with rural areas through the provision of cycle facilities.

3.7 Although Okehampton Train Station provides connectivity to places such as Exeter and Crediton, the station sits on a steep hill up from the town centre which is believed to discourage some people from using it. It has also been suggested that although the train station is successful in bringing people into the town, it has led to larger outflows of residents to other places for shopping and leisure.

3.8 There is poor accessibility between new housing developments and local amenities and schools, where in some instances there are no pavements for pedestrians or cyclists and limited public transport options. The District Council has allocated funding to improve active travel access between new housing developments and the town centre.

## Quality and appearance of the town centre

3.9 Regeneration Board members are keen to improve the quality and visual appearance of the town centre. Improved pedestrian infrastructure within the town centre has been suggested, but also smaller projects including support for property maintenance.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3 Strengths and Opportunities for more details on the BID.

## 4 Strengths and opportunities

4.1 The following strengths and opportunities have been identified through the baseline data review and policy review in Appendix One, and consultations with Okehampton Regeneration Board, which includes representatives of the Town, Hamlets, and Borough Councils, local businesses, community groups, charities and schools.

### Re-opening of the railway station

4.1 The re-opening of Okehampton railway station is viewed as an important driver of regeneration in Okehampton and is expected to encourage tourism and connectivity in and around the town. The new station has provided the opportunity for young people to access a more extensive range of further education options at Exeter College, as well as providing Okehampton residents with better access to high quality jobs in Exeter. Whilst there are potential drawbacks from being better connected to Exeter, as discussed in paragraph 3.7, it is generally agreed that improved connections bring overall net benefits to Okehampton.

4.2 West Devon Borough Council was awarded £13.4 million of Levelling Up funding in January 2023 to develop a new railway station on the edge of Okehampton, along with cycle facilities and electric vehicle charging points to promote active travel and green travel. The scheme presents an opportunity to transform Okehampton and the surrounding hamlets into a multi-modal travel exchange for the wider county, in turn helping to generate greater employment opportunities. Local stakeholders hope the new station will help reduce congestion in the town centre.

### Residential growth

4.3 High levels of housing growth over recent years has resulted in a 15% increase in the size of the local population<sup>5</sup>. In theory, an increased population brings more spending to local businesses, as well as a larger pool of potential workers to recruit from. However, evidence suggests that local businesses have not benefitted from a larger population and still struggle to recruit locally. There remains the opportunity to promote local jobs to new residents, as more residential accommodation is delivered around Okehampton. Regeneration Board members highlight the need for new local services including doctors' surgeries and dentists to ensure there is sufficient capacity to serve an increased population.

### Marketing and a clear vision

4.4 Okehampton could benefit from a collaborative marketing campaign and creation of a town vision to promote its unique offer, and help attract more day and overnight visitors (for holidays and business purposes). Although there is some marketing already undertaken by various tourism boards<sup>6</sup>, a strategic and more extensive promotion of the town as a place to stay when visiting Dartmoor National Park, and as a strategic location in the centre of Devon could bring more footfall and spending to local restaurants, cafes, shops, and accommodation. The campaign could involve developing a town app, producing brochures and leaflets, partnering with outdoor adventure organisations to help Okehampton become more well known in the outdoor adventure domain,

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix One: Context for labour market data

<sup>6</sup> See Visit South Devon, Visit Dartmoor, and Visit Okehampton



and supporting new shops catering towards walking and cycling. Marketing activity would need to be undertaken alongside encouragement of town centre shops and cafes to remain open on the weekend and at later hours to ensure new visitors are able to experience Okehampton's full offer.

4.5 Dartmoor National Park is currently preparing an application for National Lottery Heritage Funding for a wide ranging Partnership Programme, named Dartmoor Dynamic Landscapes, which aims to tackle the climate and ecological crisis, health & wellbeing needs and social deprivation including rural isolation. The programme will focus on Okehampton as one of three gateway towns to Dartmoor, aiming to improve accessibility to the Moor, increase active travel and outdoor activities, and to engage the town to play a greater role in the Dartmoor visitor economy<sup>7</sup>.

### Business Improvement District (BID)

4.6 West Devon Borough Council is currently working with local stakeholders to test the feasibility of setting up a BID for Okehampton town and the hamlets. A vote is taking place in late 2023, and if businesses are in favour, there are a number of potential benefits the BID could deliver once a set of common goals are agreed. Typically, aims of a BID include increased footfall, improved promotion and marketing of the local area, and increased business-to-business trading. This can be done through developing marketing strategies, organising events, encouraging late night shopping and other initiatives to increase the numbers of visitors to the town.

### Local producers and retailers

4.7 In the past, a local farmers' market was successful in drawing people into the town centre, but this is no longer operating. There is potential to restart the market, with effective organisation by the BID (if adopted), to support local food producers, establish strong supply chains between local businesses and generate higher levels of town centre footfall. In general, more could be made of local events such as the Okehampton Show and outdoor sporting and leisure events taking place on Dartmoor.

### Site development opportunities

4.8 There is a development opportunity at former factory sites on the North Road Industrial Estate. There is potential for a mix of employment and residential uses, and for light-industrial uses on the site opposite.

4.9 There are currently plans to develop the site at Old Mill for training facilities and small-scale residential accommodation. The site owner, Okehampton Skills and Sports Trust, is seeking to develop part of the site for the provision of skills training in areas to be identified by local educational providers, who will deliver the training. However, it is unknown when the development will come forward, as the site owners have experienced difficulties securing planning permission in recent years.

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<sup>7</sup> A summary of the Dartmoor Local Plan is provided in Appendix One: Context

## 5 Potential Project ideas

### Marketing, awareness, and developing the hub role of Okehampton

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
5.1	Creation of a Business Improvement District that represents most businesses in Okehampton. Encourage more business engagement and communication in advance of a BID.	West Devon Borough Council, Town Council, Parish Council	Actions of the BID could help reduce carbon emissions. More footfall to the town centre could reduce journeys outside of Okehampton	Improved cohesion within the business community. Delivery of common business goals including more town centre events and marketing and promotion. Greater footfall, leading to safeguarded and new employment in the town centre	West Devon Borough Council and Okehampton Town Council. Devon County Council may be able to offer further support if required	Short term
5.2	<u>Preparation</u> of a marketing and development strategy, focusing on Okehampton as the 'Gateway to Dartmoor' and a strategic hub in the centre of Devon. (Align this strategy with Dartmoor's Dynamic Landscapes which aims to promote Okehampton as a Gateway to Dartmoor).	BID West Devon Borough Council, Town/Parish Councils. HJA to prepare a	The strategy will incorporate low carbon travel initiatives and promotion of green tourism.	More promotion of Okehampton to increase visitor numbers and town centre footfall.	Devon County Council to help support this.	Short term

<sup>88</sup> Short term projects generally have funding secured and can be delivered within one year; for medium term projects there is potential funding identified and they may take between one year and three years to deliver, long term projects have no funding source identified and could take three years plus to deliver.



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
	This project is a multi-faceted approach to positioning Okehampton as the gateway to Dartmoor, formed of marketing and social media promotion, business support (particularly for leisure and hospitality sectors), opportunities arising from the new train stations, events and activities and physical developments.	business case for this project.				
5.3	<u>Delivery</u> of a marketing and development strategy (project 5.2), including developing a smartphone app and a website. The smartphone app could provide information on local activities, events, retail and hospitality options, businesses and culture, heritage and nature trails.	BID	Reduced need for paper brochures and leaflets	Better promotion of Okehampton, Increased town centre footfall and improved experience for visitors, leading to safeguarded and new employment in the town.	BID.	Medium term
5.4	Encourage nearby residents as well as visitors into the town centre. This could involve more frequent bus services between residential areas and the town centre.	BID	Provision of public transport reduces the need for private cars and subsequent congestion and pollution	Increased footfall in the town centre, leads to increased spending in local businesses, and safeguarded and new employment in the town centre	BID	Medium term
5.5	Re-establish the former weekly farmers market, selling local produce	BID	Provides opportunities to purchase food	Supports local food production and	The Borough Council may be able to offer	Short term



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
	and helping to generate increased town centre footfall.		produced locally with a lower carbon footprint.	subsequent employment. Drives town centre footfall on market days, leading to greater spend, and safeguarded and new employment.	support prior to the establishment of the BID.	
5.6	Support for public realm and property maintenance, including cleaning street furniture and rainwater infrastructure, and encouraging residents to grow flowers in gardens for visitor displays.	Town/Parish Councils	Maintenance of facilities is likely to prolong the need for replacement, thus reducing waste.	Improved vitality of the town centre will help drive footfall, leading to safeguarded and new employment in the town centre	None yet identified	Medium term

## Increasing local employment

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
5.7	Support for new and small businesses in Okehampton to help with recruitment and growth.	West Devon Borough Council (and Business Information Point)	Business growth leads to more local employment opportunities, reducing the need to travel for work	Support to help grow businesses creates employment opportunities, leading to higher household incomes	West Devon Borough Council	Medium term



	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
5.8	Delivery of vocational training for young people in Okehampton, potentially through the proposed development for skills training facilities at the Old Mill Site, with training delivered by Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust or Exeter College.	Okehampton Skills and Sports Trust, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust.	Reduced need to travel elsewhere for vocational training	More highly skilled workforce, leading to higher incomes	Okehampton Skills and Sports Trust	Medium to long term
5.9	Delivery of new employment premises, including at the North Road Industrial Estate	West Devon Borough Council	Local employment premises attract businesses and reduce the need to travel for work	Supports business growth and creates employment opportunities	None yet identified	Long term
5.10	Yearly careers fairs in the local area to connect young people with local employment opportunities.	Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust	Encourages young people to work locally, reducing the need to travel for employment	Larger pool of employees for local businesses	Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust	Short term, ongoing.



## Harnessing greater connectivity

	Project Description	Lead stakeholder	Contributes to Net Zero ambitions	Potential benefits	Potential sources of funding	Approximate timescale
5.11	Delivery of West Devon Transport Hub by March 2025	West Devon Borough Council	Reduced number of car journeys made	Greater connectivity for residents of Mid Devon. Access to more employment opportunities. Higher footfall in Okehampton town centre, leading to greater employment.	Levelling Up Fund and match funding	Medium term
5.12	Deliver active travel and public transport links between both stations and the town centre; and existing and new residential areas and the town centre. This will include EV and cycling infrastructure.	West Devon Borough Council. Devon County Council	Reduced number of car journeys made	Improved population health. Greater connectivity with Okehampton Hamlets. Higher footfall in Okehampton town centre leading to employment	Levelling Up Fund. West Devon Borough Council	Medium term

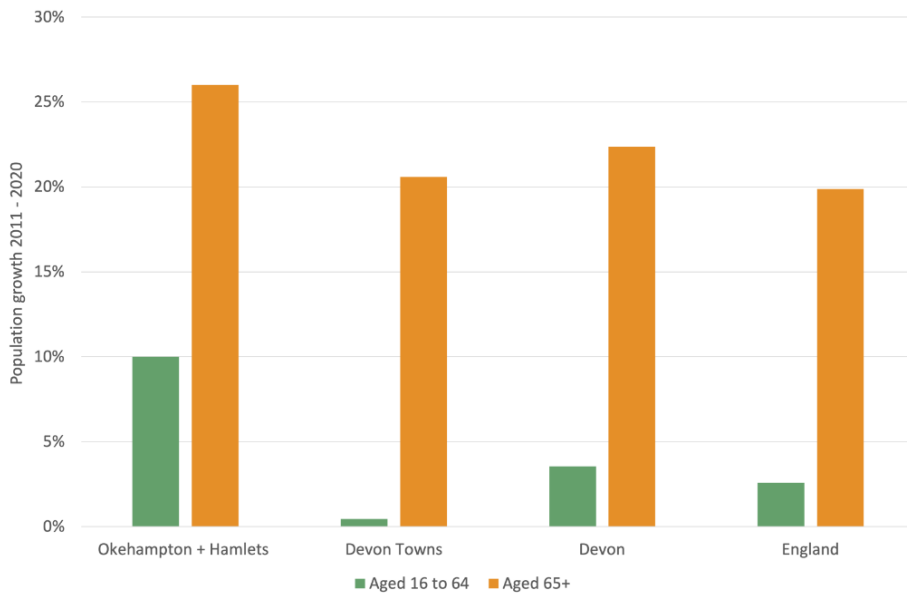
## Appendix 1. Context

A1.1 This appendix sets out socio-economic data for Okehampton and its hinterland. It will help build an understanding of the potential drivers of future economic growth in the area as well as identify challenges to the local economy.

### Labour Market

A1.2 Okehampton Town and Hamlets had an estimated population of 9,300 in 2020, having seen 15% growth in the years from 2011<sup>9</sup>. This makes it one of the fastest growing of the 25 towns in Devon<sup>10</sup>. Much of this growth can be attributed to major housing developments to the east of the town. The working age population increased by 10% between 2011 and 2020 and the number of those aged 65+ grew by 26%. Whilst growth in the population aged 65+ is greater than the overall Devon, regional and national averages, the working age population has also grown at a faster rate than these comparators, meaning that although Okehampton is growing older, this trend is weaker than that seen elsewhere. The old age dependency ratio (the number of those aged 65+ as a proportion of the working age population) was below the Devon towns average in 2020.

Figure A1: Population growth in Okehampton and comparators, 2011 - 2020



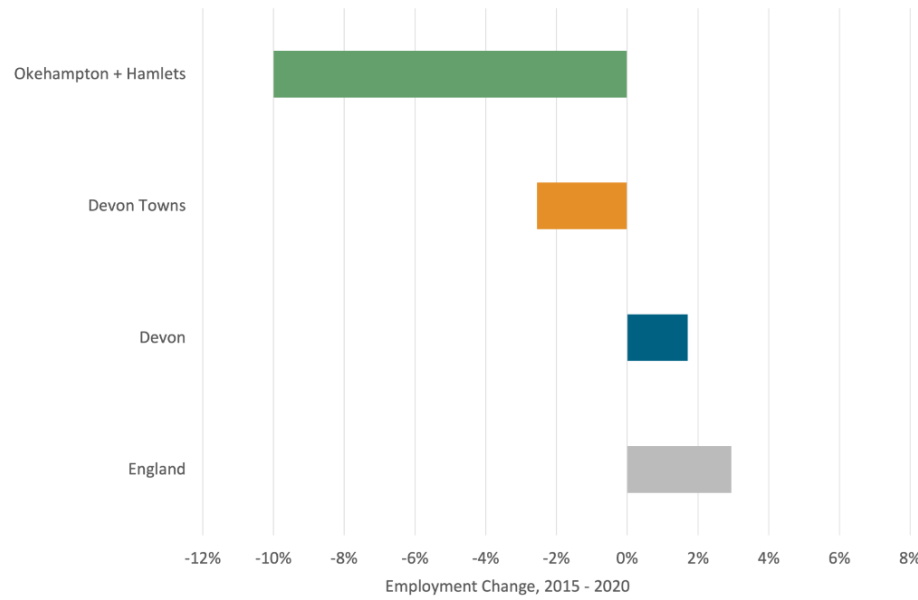
<sup>9</sup> Source: ONS Population Estimates. This figure represents the population of Okehampton Town and Hamlets and aligns with the defined area for the Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan.

<sup>10</sup> These are all towns in Devon with an estimated population greater than 5,000 in 2020. Cranbrook has been excluded as a comparator area as a new town will see significant growth above what will be seen in established towns.

Source: ONS Population Estimates, 2020

A1.3 In 2020, there were 3,600 people employed in Okehampton and the Hamlets, falling from just over 4,000 in 2015<sup>11</sup>. This 10% decline is considerable compared with the 3% decline experienced on average across the Devon towns, and the 3% employment growth seen in the South West and England. Between 2015 and 2019 there was a rise in employment, followed by a 14% decline between 2019 and 2020 (likely due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The Construction and Human Health & Social Care sectors experienced the most significant decline in employment between 2015 and 2020, falling by 36% and 57%, respectively.

**Figure A2: Employment change in Okehampton and comparators, 2015 - 2020**



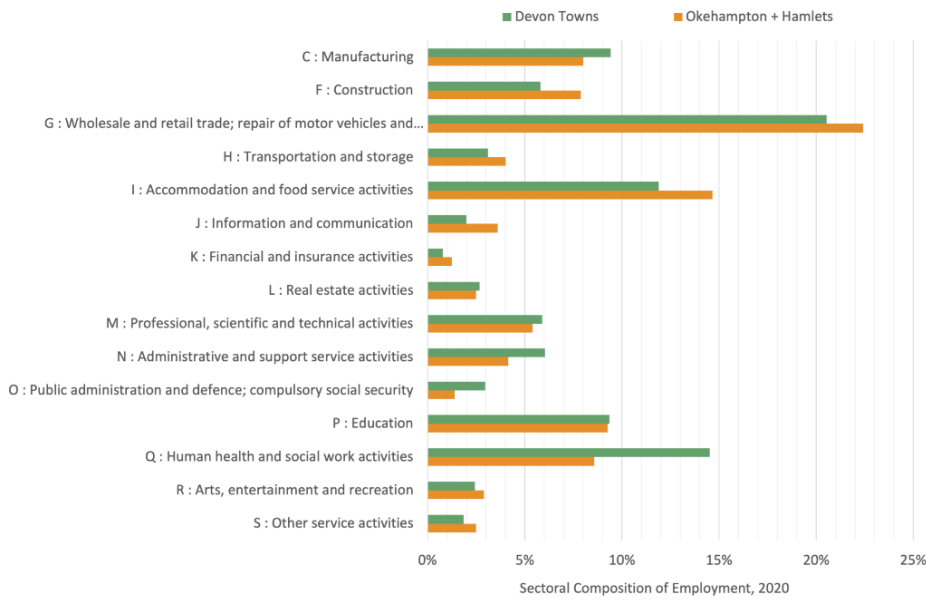
Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2021

A1.4 Okehampton and the Hamlets had a higher proportion of workers in Accommodation & Food Service Activities and Information & Communication than the Devon towns average in 2020. These sectors have also seen high growth since 2015. Other sectors with a particularly high proportion of workers include Education and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, which have both seen substantial growth since 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey. Due to the way that BRES data is collected, this figure is representative of a marginally wider area than the Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan area. Note that these figures do not include those working in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector as this data is unreliable at a town level.



Figure A3: Sectoral composition of employment, 2020



A1.5 The employment ratio (of workers to residents) was slightly lower than the average for Devon towns in 2020, a ratio of 0.34 compared with 0.37<sup>12</sup>. Okehampton sees net-out commuting (latest data is from Census 2011), with 2,700 commuting into the town and 3,000 commuting out<sup>13</sup>. It is unclear how or whether the Covid-19 pandemic and declining employment in the town has impacted this.

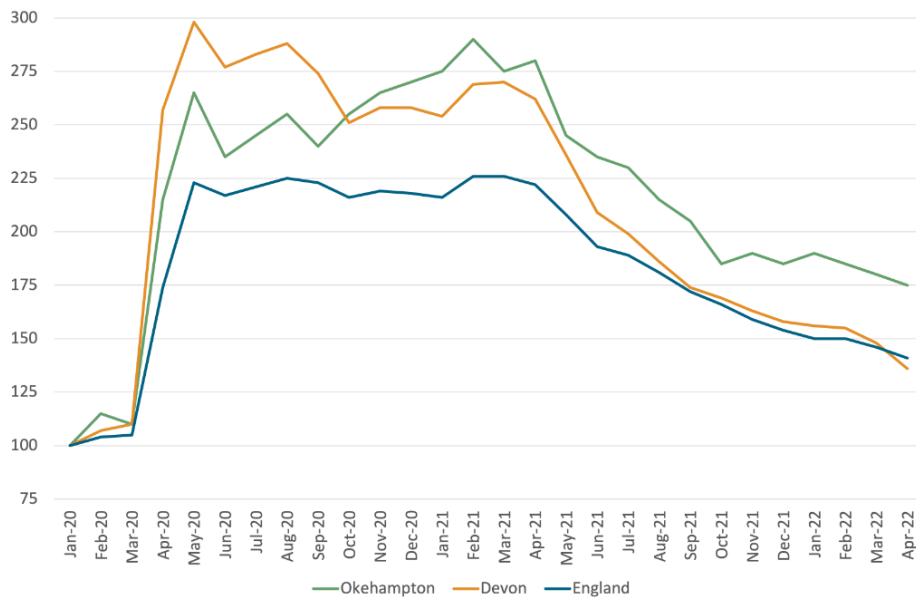
A1.6 In 2019 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic) the average claimant count for the year was approximately 1% of the working age population of Okehampton<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> This is for the Built Up Area of Okehampton which does not include the Hamlets

<sup>13</sup> Source: Census 2011. This is for the Built Up Area of Okehampton which does not include the Hamlets

<sup>14</sup> Source: Claimant Count by Sex and Age. This is for the Built Up Area of Okehampton which does not include the Hamlets

Figure A4: Indexed Claimant Count, Jan 2020 - April 2022 (100 = base year)



Source: ONS Claimant Count by sex and age, 2022

A1.7 Figure A4 shows that the claimant count in Okehampton increased at a higher rate than the average for England but less than Devon, as a result of Covid-19. Although there had been some recovery from the peak of the pandemic, the claimant count in Okehampton remained 75% higher in April 2022 than at the start of the period. This recovery rate compares poorly to the Devon and England benchmarks.

### Deprivation and vulnerability to future decline

A1.8 Okehampton is the eighth most deprived of 25 towns in Devon according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019.

A1.9 Three measures of the vulnerability of towns to future decline have been constructed for this study:

- Okehampton is ranked thirteenth of 25 Devon towns for vulnerability to the impacts of Covid-19 (based on employment in sectors vulnerable to Covid-19 impacts, and changes to the claimant count in 2020 and 2021)
- It is ranked ninth of 25 for structural vulnerability (based on the population age structure, Index of Multiple Deprivation, income data in the IMD, and the claimant count as a proportion of the working age population)
- It ranks tenth of 25 for combined vulnerability (i.e. vulnerability to Covid-19 and structural vulnerability)



A1.10 The highest ranked ward in Okehampton in the separate Devon County Council vulnerability index (May 2021) is ranked at forty-second in Devon (out of a total of 457). This is the 'Okehampton South West – Hospital area, Belstone, Meldon and surrounding areas' ward.

A1.11 Okehampton College provides post-16 education and was rated "1-Outstanding" at its last Ofsted inspection (2014)<sup>15</sup>.

A1.12 In comparison with average retail vacancy rates in Great Britain of 14.5% in October 2021, vacancy rates in Okehampton in November 2021 were considerably lower at 6%<sup>16</sup>. This is a lower vacancy rate than that reported in the previous visit to the town and, when compared with the other towns visited around the same period was performing well (third lowest vacancy rate out of ten towns).

## Policy

### Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014 - 2034

A1.13 The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan<sup>17</sup> identifies Okehampton as an important service centre for many of its surrounding rural communities, including Okehampton Hamlets parish where employment and residential development is planned to take place. The town is strategically located for access to the A30 connecting the area to the M5 and Exeter and for its proximity to Dartmoor National Park, which attracts tourism to the town.

A1.14 The future of Okehampton will be driven by increasing employment opportunities to support the long-term resilience of the town and using opportunities to build community infrastructure related to new housing developments. Increasing connectivity in and around Okehampton is also a key priority of the Plan. This will be undertaken through maximising the potential of the A30 and creating stronger bus and rail links to Exeter and nearby towns and through enhancing existing connections to Dartmoor National Park and the surrounding landscape.

A1.15 There are plans for Okehampton to provide 775 new homes (brown on the map) and 77,700 sq m of employment floorspace (blue on map) over the Plan period, primarily in the east of the town as per the figure below.

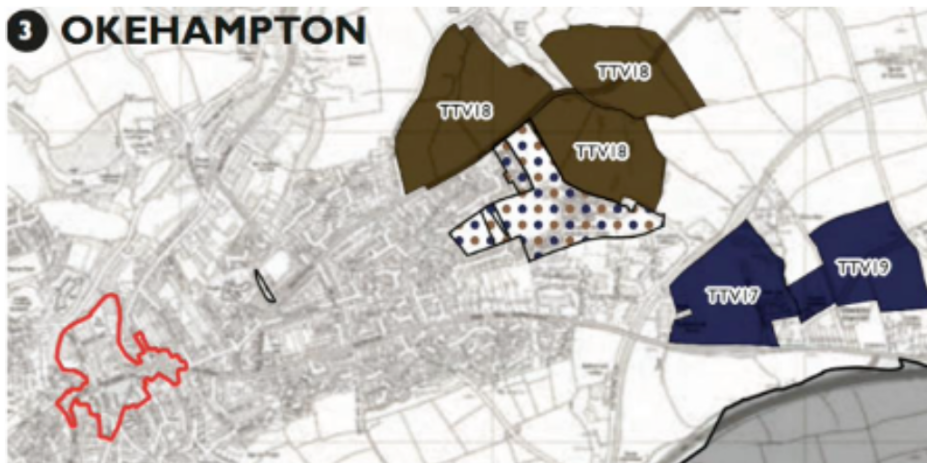
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<sup>15</sup> Source: <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/145337/okehampton-college/secondary>

<sup>16</sup> Source: Local Data Company

<sup>17</sup> West Devon Borough Council, South Hams District Council and Plymouth City Council (2019)  
<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/JLPAadoptedVersion.pdf>

Figure A5: Proposals Map



Source: Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan

### Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan

A1.16 A Regulation 14 Draft of the Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan was approved in January 2023<sup>18</sup>. This plan covers Okehampton and Okehampton Hamlets (the vast majority of which is within the Dartmoor National Park Authority area).

A1.17 Five themes for Neighbourhood Plan policies are identified, including housing and development, green space and green infrastructure, supporting local business growth, town centre development and traffic, and transport and parking.

A1.18 In alignment with these themes, the Plan sets out eight objectives for Okehampton:

1. Encourage future housing growth to meet the needs of the local community whilst minimising the impact on the natural environment and delivering high quality design.
2. Ensure easy access to the countryside through green connections, protect and enhance local green spaces whilst supporting nature conservation.
3. Protect and enhance the distinctive rural landscape, natural environment and biodiversity of the area.
4. Creating an environment that makes it attractive for businesses and tourism to flourish.
5. Support the retention and improvement of existing employment space and encourage a range of further businesses.
6. Conserve and enhance the character and heritage of Okehampton Town and Okehampton Hamlets.

<sup>18</sup> Post Regulation 14 Draft Okehampton Town and Hamlets Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2034.  
<https://okehamptonneighbourhoodplan.com>

7. Support and enhance the range of services and community facilities.
8. Improve highway safety and provide adequate off-road parking for residents, workers and visitors.

A1.19 Objectives 4, 5, 7 and 8 are in alignment with the objectives identified through consultations with the Okehampton Regeneration Board.

#### **Dartmoor Local Plan**

A1.20 Although Okehampton is located outside the National Park boundary, it is one of five key settlements close to the park, and is a service centre for many Dartmoor residents. The primary strategic priority of the Local Plan<sup>19</sup> is to deliver National Park purposes and protect Dartmoor's 'Special Qualities' which are 'the National Park's distinctive and significant features which distinguish it from other areas'. The aim of the Local Plan's spatial strategy is to focus development opportunities in the most sustainable locations, where it relates well to existing development and to only enable appropriate development opportunities in less sustainable locations.

A1.21 Okehampton is referenced as the nearest railway station to the park, and this is seen as an opportunity for residents to use more sustainable travel.

A1.22 New tourism development within park boundaries is only supported under limited circumstances, and typically only in local centres or rural settlements. With limited tourism accommodation development permitted, Dartmoor is somewhat reliant on development in hubs in neighbouring districts.

#### **Transport Plans**

A1.23 The Dartmoor Line (re-opened in November 2021) provides an hourly rail service connecting Okehampton and Exeter (via Crediton), running seven days a week.

A1.24 The Devon County Council Bus Services Improvement Plan<sup>20</sup> notes that Okehampton has a lower bus service frequency than would be expected given its population, likely due to its more remote location. There are a number of proposals to improve bus links to Okehampton rail station including links to the Tamar Valley rail line (Plymouth-Gunnislake) and a new service to Hatherleigh.

A1.25 The Local Transport Plan<sup>21</sup> lists a relief road in Okehampton as one of ten targeted capital investments. This would address existing congestion issues and mitigate the impact of further developments in the town.

#### **Placemaking Report (2022)**

A1.26 West Devon Borough Council Economic Development Team have been working with Okehampton Town Council to explore the creation of a business forum, such as a Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement District. In making a case for setting up a business forum, the Council undertook a business survey to understand the perceived challenges, barriers and opportunities faced by the business community in Okehampton.

A1.27 The results from the survey revealed that approximately two-thirds of businesses believe that business had either remained constant throughout Covid-19, that business had decreased during

<sup>19</sup> Dartmoor National Park Local Authority (2021). Dartmoor Local Plan 2018 – 2036.

<sup>20</sup> Devon County Council (2021) National Bus Strategy: Bus Services Improvement Plan

<sup>21</sup> Devon County Council and Torbay Council (2011) Local Transport Plan Devon and Torbay Strategy 2011 - 2026

Covid-19 but has now returned to pre-Covid-19 levels, or that business levels had increased overall since before the pandemic.

A1.28 80% of businesses believe that Okehampton provides the right environment for them to flourish. Within this group of respondents, the most common reasons are the good transport links to the area. Within the group of respondents that believed Okehampton does not provide the right environment for their businesses to flourish, the most common reason was that the town requires the introduction of branded retailers to the high street.

A1.29 When questioned on enhancements which could be made to the town to improve the business experience, 70% of respondents answered with 'reducing congestion through the town centre'. Over 30% of respondents answered that increasing parking would improve the business experience.

### **Thematic Delivery Plan 2021–2024**

5.13 This Council Plan for West Devon<sup>22</sup> sets out the 20 year vision for the Borough, as well as actions to achieve this vision.

5.14 A key theme is to stimulate a thriving economy, through supporting public realm enhancements in Okehampton, delivering marketing and publicity schemes across the borough, offering business advice services for existing, expanding and new businesses and delivering an inward investment campaign to attract new businesses to West Devon.

5.15 Other themes include strengthening communities and wellbeing, improving homes, growing the natural environment and adapting the built environment.

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<sup>22</sup> West Devon Council (2021). Thematic Delivery Plan 2021-2024.



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