

## Rackenfod and Creacombe Plan

### The place

1. Rackenfod and Creacombe is a large and very rural parish of 4000 acres, consisting of farmland and moor. The small village of Rackenfod with 67 houses contains about half the population of 382 (2012) . A small cluster consisting of Rackenfod manor and six houses opposite it is 1.5km outside the village; the hamlet of Creacombe, 5km further on, is smaller still. The remaining 70 or so houses are farms and cottages widely scattered across the landscape.
2. The age breakdown of the population is very similar to that of North Devon as a whole, with slightly more under 19 (23%) and slightly fewer (20%) over 65. The main feature of the local economy is agriculture; there are 18 working farms and a number of smallholdings. Unlike many villages of this size, Rackenfod has managed to keep its school, its shop and its pub. The primary school with 72 children is the largest employer, with four full time and five part time jobs, followed by the Little Angels Nursery with three and by The Stag. There is a small haulage business with two jobs and an agricultural contractor/ mechanics business with three. 15 people are self employed, working from village houses. Some 20 people, mostly retired, volunteer at the community- owned village shop. Not counting these, there is an almost equal balance between local/self employed jobs and the number of village residents who commute out to work.
3. The village is on high land off the C784, 3km from the Stonelands Cross exit off the A361. There is no public transport and this often narrow C road is the main link to Tiverton, which at 13km distance is the nearest provider of health services, secondary education and main retail options. Heavy traffic on the A361 in summer and snow in winter can have an isolating effect. The other lanes crossing the parish are mainly single line traffic and unsuited to large vehicles.
4. Rackenfod's main asset is its "greenness". Rackenfod Common surrounds its north-west corner, and is effectively extended up to the village street by an undeveloped field in front of the well designed 1960s row of what were council houses (Meadow View). The fact that the original village layout down each side of one street has largely been preserved means that almost all houses have an open view of countryside from their back windows. There is no straggling development. Traffic and parking is something of a problem along the main street and especially outside the School, and this road narrows sharply, to the south of the development boundary, to become a winding lane. Village houses are almost all two storey, with rendered elevations under slate roofs; they include a number of old cottages, some terraced. There is a mixture of traditional and urbanised design among the newer houses. The Church, the Stag , the Bible Christian chapel and the Old Rectory are listed buildings and the School still occupies its original 1872 provision. Other listed buildings in the parish are Rackenfod Manor, Middlecott farmhouse, Creacombe Barton and the Creacombe church, now converted to a house.

## **The spatial vision for Rackenford to 2031**

Rackenford will maintain its village as a lively place with a balance of age groups and with at least the present level of local employment. Some development is needed to secure this and to ensure the survival of the School, The Stag and the village shop. Development would not be sustainable on anything more than a small scale; there is no public transport service and none is ever likely, as Rackenford is not on a main route to any other significant settlement.

The development planned will be achieved without significant damage to the village's green character. Building behind existing or new houses will be avoided, so that nearly all houses continue to have an open view behind or in front. This is also ensured by defining the field in front of Meadow View as open space. No housing development is planned for which access would be necessary any further south than the entrance to Coles Yard, so there will be no addition to the problems of traffic in the middle and south of the village street. An additional light industrial employment site has been earmarked; there is another some 2km from the village and expansion at the Prospect garage would also be acceptable.

The addition of a village hall, to be shared with the School, will be supported by this development.

Other visual objectives are to protect the listed buildings in the village – the Church, the old chapel and The Stag – and their settings, and similarly the other listed buildings in the parish. The possibility of making better use of the Church for community and School purposes will be pursued. Another target is to get rid of the unsightly tangle of electric cables with which the village is at present draped.

Outside the village there may be some windfall provision of one or two additional houses on the Rackenford Manor cottage cluster, where an old equestrian site is unused. Additionally the Rackenford Club site 1km outside the village would be suitable for either extra houses or employment use (though the Club house should be conserved) if change of use becomes inevitable. Over the rest of the parish the main objective is to support farmers and landowners in conservation of the landscape, and assist the survival of the small to medium pastoral farms which make up this landscape and so underpin tourism. More b&b and holiday cottage provision will be encouraged, as will sensitive barn conversion to single dwellings or appropriate small workshops, and small scale renewable energy projects where output is mainly for farm use.

## **Growth Strategy**

5. There are 63 houses within the present development boundary and four others close to it. Six village houses are part of the North Devon Housing Association and at April 2013 there were five people on its waiting list for Rackenford. Three sites for small housing developments have been identified. (1) is a continuation of the east side of the street northwards to the War Memorial, behind Bradford cottages. This would include some allotment provision of which at present there is none. (2) is an infill along

the east side of the street below Prospect Farm and up to The Cottage. It is limited to a maximum of three houses, spaced to allow eastward views from the upper floors of The Retreat and Cherry Cottage and southward from the listed Chapel. The new development boundary restricts building here to a single row of houses. Coles Yard, currently the site of a haulage business but which would be more appropriate for housing if the owner were to wish to sell or move, is (3). This is a longer term proposal and should include some public parking. In total the provision is estimated to be for some 12 new houses, or about 18% growth for the village. This is felt to be the maximum limit above which village character would be significantly affected (ST08).

6. It would be desirable for 25% of these to be affordable, but it seems unlikely that these numbers will attract a developer unless the same organisation were to take on at least two of the sites. Of the six houses which have been built in Rackenford since 2001, five were priced at the bottom end of market housing, and four of these are now occupied by local families. Proposals of this kind will be preferred. Village styles, which are principally either terraced cottages (Merrivale cottages) or early 19<sup>th</sup> century detached (Rose Cottage), in all cases rendered and two-storey, will be required; other details to target are low roof lines and an absence of front gardens and garages.
7. All these sites will be developed without depriving any houses, including the new ones, of a rural view from at least one side.
8. The field in front of Meadow View (6) will be designated as open space. The preferred site for the village hall is at the south-west corner of this field, abutting the common. Public parking provision will be improved by taking a small strip off the south of the field, up to the Shop, partly for this purpose. A share of this will also be designated for future expansion of the community shop itself. The other site for the village hall, below the school, would alternatively provide school parking and additional play space.
9. The brownfield Crossways garage site (4) which includes a bungalow will be designated for light industry or housing. Any development here will be subject to a S 106 condition of improvement of the very dangerous cross roads layout. The other existing light industrial employment site, Prospect Farm, is also suitable for some expansion. Although it falls outside the development boundary proposed, the Rackenford Club site (5) if it were to come on the market would be suitable for either employment or residential use, though the club building itself should be preserved.

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## **Spatial objectives and vision to 2031 - summary**

1. To avoid a decline in population by maintaining Rackenford village as a lively place with a balance of ages and at least the current level of local employment.
2. To ensure the survival of the School, The Stag, the Church and the Shop.
3. To preserve the village's "greenness", which means almost all houses having an open view from one direction as well as the use of the common and the field opposite Meadow View.
4. To avoid the increase of traffic down the village street and improve the provision of parking spaces.
5. To protect our listed buildings and their settings and to improve the village environment by removing the drapery of electricity and telephone cables.
6. To provide a village hall to be shared by the community and the school and possibly the pub.
7. To support farmers and landowners in the conservation of the rural environment and in farm diversification proposals such as building conversion to single dwellings or small workshops, or small scale renewable energy projects with output mainly for farm use.