



Local Government Reorganisation.

The South Hams Society reviewed the five local government body submissions and how they impact upon the South Hams area.

1. The "One Devon" Model (Devon County Council Proposal)

The simplest proposal. A single massive unitary council for the whole of Devon (excluding the current Plymouth and Torbay footprints).

2. South Hams, West Devon, and Teignbridge Plan.

Their preferred strategy is known as the "Reimagining Devon" (or 4-5-1) Proposal.

South Hams, West Devon, and Teignbridge—along with four other district councils—have proposed a model that keeps their current territories largely intact but upgrades them to a single-tier system. This means the abolition of Devon County Council (DCC) and the South Hams District Council (SHDC) in favour of one new "super-council"

Creates a new **Torbay and Southern Devon Unitary.**

This would merge South Hams, West Devon, Teignbridge, and Torbay into one powerful authority.

The Status of Plymouth: Under this plan, Plymouth remains exactly as it is now, with no expansion into South Hams.

3. East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon & Torridge proposal — THREE unitaries with boundary changes.

The "Exeter and Northern Devon" Unitary

Part of the "Reimagining Devon" (or 4-5-1) Proposal.

The four districts would merge with the city of Exeter to create a single "super-unitary" authority.

4. Plymouth and Exeter Plan. officially submitted as a joint proposal during the government's 2026 consultation—represents the most radical departure from Devon's current borders.

The "Four-Unitary" Vision

Plymouth and Exeter City Councils jointly proposed dividing the county into four distinct unitary authorities. Their logic is based on "**functional economic geography**"—the idea

that people live, work, and travel in patterns that ignore ancient county and district borders.

Expanded Plymouth

- **The Area:** Plymouth City + 13 neighbouring parishes from the South Hams.
- **The Logic:** These areas are effectively "commuter belts" for Plymouth. The city argues it needs this land for strategic housing and transport planning to support its growing workforce.

The Plymouth boundary would shift from Elburton to beyond the Grade I listed Fleet house.



The distance of Kingsbridge to Plymouth would shrink from 17 miles to just 10 miles.

Expanded Exeter

- **The Area:** Exeter City + **49 surrounding parishes** currently in Teignbridge, East Devon, and Mid Devon.
- **The Logic:** Exeter is one of the UK's fastest-growing cities. The plan would unite the city with its "growth points" (like Cranbrook and the Exe Valley) under one administration.

Expanded Torbay

- **The Area:** The current Torbay footprint + 5 parishes from the South Hams.
- **The Logic:** This creates a powerful "Greater South Devon" coastal authority centred on the Bay.

Devon Coast and Countryside

- **The Area:** A massive, purely rural authority covering North Devon, Torrington, and the remaining parts of West Devon and East Devon.
- **The Logic:** This council would be specifically tailored to rural needs, such as agriculture and remote service delivery, without having to compete for resources with the "big cities."

5. The Torbay Council Plan. (Four Unitaries)

Torbay Council: Stays exactly as it is (Torquay, Paignton, and Brixham).

Expanded Plymouth: Plymouth grows to include its immediate "commuter belt" parishes.

New Exeter Council: A new urban council for Exeter and its surrounding growth areas.

Rural Devon Coast & Countryside: A massive new council covering the rest of the county (essentially replacing the current Devon County Council and the remaining rural districts).

South Hams Society's opinion.

The **Plymouth and Exeter** proposal strips almost a third of the South Hams parishes and is fundamentally at odds with principles of localism and community self-determination. Plymouth City Council seek to grow the city from its current 31 square miles to 115 square miles. The plan also removes a further 23.5 square miles of the South Hams to be transferred to Torbay, a total loss of 107.5 miles. The Plymouth/Exeter plan treats residents as "units of labour/commuters" (functional geography), whereas the South Hams Society treats them as "citizens of a community" (historic identity), we therefore considered the plan completely unacceptable.

Torbay's plan.

A Torbay residents' survey, completed by over 1,400 respondents, found that 64% of residents support keeping Torbay's existing boundaries. Torbay have stated that they are therefore committed to respecting this strong local mandate.

Torbay's leadership has argued that the "Bay" is a distinct, self-contained community that works best when it isn't merged with or diluted by rural areas.

Torbay's position creates an issue for all the other plans except for 'One Devon' in that Torbay wishes to remain as a unitary authority retaining its existing boundary and the council considers that they have the support of a public mandate.

Again, we found the expanded Plymouth part of the plan to be unacceptable.

South Hams, West Devon, and Teignbridge Plan together with the East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon & Torridge plan (4 – 5 - 1).

If we accept that communities must have the final say over their own boundaries and that anything less undermines local democracy, then there is the issue of Torbay. The council states that it has a mandate to remain as a unitary authority with its current boundary.

There is a strong public mandate for the parishes around Plymouth to remain outside the city boundary and it has been stated that, self-determination is not a sliding scale — you either have it or you don't.

The "Torbay Paradox." If we respect the mandate of the 13 parishes to stay out of Plymouth, logically we must respect Torbay's mandate to remain independent — which effectively collapses the "4-5-1" model and leaves "One Devon" as the only structurally viable survivor

That along with concerns of a major fiscal risk — if the South Hams is partitioned, the remaining "rural" council inherits the massive cost of maintaining Dartmoor National Park with a significantly smaller tax base, the Society concluded that the One Devon was the only option remaining.

One Devon provides a 'safety in numbers' approach. By keeping most of the county under one roof, it prevents the rural areas from being carved up and 'cherry-picked' by the expanding cities, ensuring that the wealth generated in growing areas continues to subsidize services in remote rural villages.