



# Village Thresholds Evidence Report

February 2013

# 'Village Thresholds' Evidence Report

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## 1.0 Introduction and Policy Context

### Introduction

- 1.1 Fenland District Council is producing the Fenland Local Plan - Core Strategy, which sets out the framework for how development will be considered across the district to 2031.
- 1.2 This evidence report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for an element of Part A of Policy CS12 – Rural Areas Development Policy.
- 1.3 Specifically it provides evidence of the need to restrict residential development within rural settlements to a 10% limit unless there is strong demonstrable support from the local community to justify why this should be exceeded.

### National Context

- 1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012.
- 1.5 Paragraph 6 of the NPPF sets out that: *“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.”*

Paragraph 17 explains that: *“Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, a set of core land-use planning principles should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking.”* Of these 12 principles bullet point 11 explains *“that planning should:*

- *actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable”*

Paragraph 55 sets out that: *“To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of local communities.”*

- 1.6 The above NPPF guidance has been taken into account in preparing the Core Strategy as a whole, including Policy CS12.
- 1.7 Moving away from the NPPF, the Localism Act gave, through changes to the Planning Act, local parish and town councils the power to produce a Neighbourhood Plan should they wish to do so. No such plan has been commenced in Fenland to date, though the legislation is still in its infancy and nationally interest is beginning to pick up speed. There is no reason why in Fenland, which is entirely ‘parished’, should the concept of neighbourhood planning not take off.

## 2. Fenland Context

- 2.1 The Proposed Submission Fenland Local Plan - Core Strategy seeks to encourage growth within the district in a sustainable way. The Council is planning for 11,000 new homes during the plan period to run between 2011 and 2031.

- 2.2 The location of where growth should occur is set out in the Settlement Hierarchy of the Core Strategy. Policy CS3 (Settlement Hierarchy) describes five categories of settlement types where varying levels of growth should be located, namely Market Towns, Growth Villages, Limited Growth Villages, Small Villages and Other Villages.
- 2.3 The majority of the district's new housing, employment retail growth and wider service provision is to be directed to the market towns of March, Wisbech, Chatteris and Whittlesey as these are considered the most sustainable locations for large scale development as they have a wide range of services which can be accessed relatively easily by methods other than by private cars.
- 2.4 The other four categories cover the smaller settlements within the district. These vary in population and service provision and each has been considered for inclusion within the Settlement Hierarchy based on a range of criteria. Those considered suitable for inclusion have been put into one of the four remaining categories. The report on the Fenland Settlement Hierarchy is set out in a separate evidence document. The amount of growth likely to come forward for each settlement will be partly dependent on its position within the Settlement Hierarchy as well as other local constraints such as flood risk.
- 2.5 The Council considers it important that (and in line with advice in the NPPF) some housing development is provided in villages to help to support the rural economy and local services and facilities such as shops and primary schools.
- 2.6 In addition the Council has decided that it does not wish to have village envelope limits or "development area boundaries" (DABs) as they are known locally i.e. lines drawn on a map around each settlement to determine the limits of new growth. Rather than this traditional method it is proposing to use criteria to determine where development should be most appropriately located. This alternative approach is intended to provide flexibility to ensure that necessary and high quality developments come forward at the appropriate time. Eleven criteria (a to k) are set out in Part A of Policy CS 12 - Rural Areas Development Policy. These seek to ensure that only the most appropriate sites in and around villages come forward for development.
- 2.7 The Council though is mindful that there may be a large number of sites within the district that successfully meet the criteria. It does not wish to see large scale unrestrained housing development in villages which would be contrary to the principles of sustainable development and, thus, contrary to the NPPF. It therefore considers it important that some form of threshold is established which prevents unrestrained and unsustainable growth in rural settlements.
- 2.8 Through public consultation responses on the Core Strategy the Council has also been made aware, albeit to a limited degree, that some of the villages would like to see a larger amount of housing development than proposed whilst others would prefer to see less development than proposed or no development at all. These views have been taken into account in preparing the Core Strategy.
- 2.9 Overall, the Council considers that some development may be beneficial for each settlement commensurate with its position within the Settlement Hierarchy. However, the Council also considers that in order to prevent excessive and locally

unsupported development coming forward in non-market towns, evidence should be provided to show public acceptance of the development.

- 2.10 This evidence could either be in the form of a Neighbourhood Plan, or alternatively in the form of a pre-application community consultation exercise which establishes, clearly and categorically, demonstrable evidence of strong widespread local community support for a proposed scheme.

### **3. Core Strategy Policy**

- 3.1 The Council has set a broad housing target of approximately 1,200 dwellings to be constructed within Fenland but away from the four market towns during the plan period 2011 – 2031. This equates to just over one tenth of the total number of dwellings to be built during the plan period.
- 3.2 This is based on the premise that some limited development in villages would be of benefit in supporting rural communities and allowing villages to thrive. To convert this 'limited development' idea into a number, an increase of around 10% of the dwelling stock in each settlement is considered reasonable. Such a level of development should allow the rural economy to be maintained and to prosper by allowing people to support local services and facilities, whilst not resulting in unrestrained and unsustainable development which would be contrary to the objectives of the Core Strategy and the NPPF.
- 3.3 Table 1 shows the number of dwellings in each of the Fenland villages as identified in the Settlement Hierarchy of the Core Strategy. The numbers have been calculated by identifying all of the dwellings within the DAB of each settlement, including the numbers in "satellite" DABs which are removed from the main part of the village. In addition any sizeable residential developments which have occurred outside the DAB since the adoption of the Fenland District-Wide Local Plan in 1993 have been included. Individual or small groups of dwellings which fall outside an established DAB have not been included.
- 3.4 It is estimated that if each of the villages was to increase its dwelling stock by 10% over the plan period this would result in a total of approximately 898 new homes being provided. This is shown in Table 1.
- 3.5 Some villages however are likely to be willing to provide for a greater number of homes than the 10% increase. To ensure that this is in line with the wishes of the local community the Council considers that this should be established through a Neighbourhood Plan, or if one has not been prepared or completed, through a robust public consultation exercise which shows demonstrable support for such an increase over and above the 10% threshold.
- 3.6 Where villages are prepared to support an increase over the 10% threshold, there could be a total of about 302 extra dwellings which could come forward via this route, if sanctioned by local residents, to give a total of 1,200 new dwellings in villages during the period of the Core Strategy (i.e.  $898 + 302 = 1,200$ ). The Council considers the 302 dwellings will provide sufficient flexibility to provide for its target number as well as assisting local communities to decide how their villages develop.

- 3.7 The 302 figure is not a fixed target figure, however, and only given here as a way of illustrating the point. For example, the 302 figure will increase if some villages do not use up their '10%' allowance, thus giving those settlements which want to increase by more than 10% the opportunity to do so. Alternatively, the 302 figure could decrease if dwellings are permitted in the open countryside away from any of the villages listed (with such dwellings still counting towards the 1,200 target).
- 3.8 Aside from the NPPF, the evidence to support the policy comprises representations and comments received on the Core Strategy policies and the desire of the Council to plan sustainably and flexibly whilst giving local people a say in how their areas develop.

#### **4 Alternative Reasonable Options**

- 4.1 Option 1: Provide development limits to villages with a line drawn on a map. The Council has decided that it no longer wishes to pursue this form of managing development in and around settlements. Rather a criteria based strategic approach, combined with Neighbourhood Planning, is preferred in order to give greater flexibility to which sites come forward for development, and considers this entirely in the spirit of what the NPPF recommends.
- 4.2 Option 2: Have a criteria based policy to control development in and around settlements with a higher (or nil) upper threshold of numbers. There are many instances in around Fenland villages where the criteria as set out in Part A of Policy CS12 could theoretically be met. If all of the sites were granted planning permission and built out this would result in a large number of dwellings being constructed in rural areas away from key services and facilities and result in unsustainable development, contrary to the objective of sustainable development as advised in the NPPF and in the Core Strategy. It may also be contrary to the wishes of local people which the Council recognises should be given a greater say in how their communities develop. The 1,200 target in the plan would almost certainly be breached.
- 4.3 Option 3: Have a criteria based policy to control development in and around settlements but with a strict 10% ceiling for each settlement. This would ensure that no further residential development above the 10% threshold would be allowed. However this would be contrary to the Localism Act by preventing local residents from producing a Neighbourhood Plan to suit the identified needs of their area.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 This evidence report demonstrates that Fenland District Council's Core Strategy village threshold policy for controlling development in rural settlements is entirely reasonable and provides for the needs of Fenland residents. Alternative options have been considered, but rejected.
- 5.2 Overall, the Council considers this approach and how it relates to the policy to be sound.

**Table 1: Dwellings in Fenland Villages as in Policy CS3 – Settlement Hierarchy**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>Built Stock at 1 April 2011</b>	<b>Net Built Stock at Jan 2013 (for info) (excludes commitments)</b>	<b>10% Increase from April 2011(rounded to nearest whole number)</b>	<b>Total Dwellings Permitted/ Completed before 10% threshold breached</b>
1	Benwick	424	426	42	466
2	Christchurch	228	230	23	251
3	Church End	65	66	7	72
4	Coates	506	506	51	557
5	Coldham	55	55	6	61
6	Collett's Bridge	26	26	3	29
7	Doddington	844	844	84	928
8	Eastrea	330	332	33	363
9	Elm <sup>(1)</sup>	728	731	73	801
10	Foul Anchor	24	24	2	26
11	Friday Bridge <sup>(2)</sup>	575	578	58	633
12	Gorefield	333	345	33	366
13	Guyhirn	245	248	25	270
14	Leverington <sup>(3)</sup>	952	959	95	1047
15	Manea <sup>(4)</sup>	822	842	82	904
16	Murrow	382	390	38	420
17	Newton	178	179	18	196
18	Parson Drove	327	329	33	360
19	Pondersbridge	72	72	7	79
20	Rings End	41	41	4	45
21	Tholomas	34	36	3	37

	Drove				
22	Turves	177	177	18	195
23	Tydd Gote <sup>(5)</sup>	11	11	1	12
24	Tydd St Giles	271	279	27	298
25	Wimblington <sup>(6)</sup>	771	771	77	848
26	Wisbech St Mary	564	568	56	620
<b>Total<sup>(7)</sup></b>		8985	9065	898	9884

Notes:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Includes 10 dwellings from three satellite DABs – Total of 20 shared jointly with Friday Bridge

<sup>2</sup> Includes 10 dwellings from three satellite DABs – Total of 20 shared jointly with Elm

<sup>3</sup> Includes Leverington Common

<sup>4</sup> Includes Charlemont Drive area

<sup>5</sup> Excludes area within South Holland District Council Boundary

<sup>6</sup> Includes Eastwood End

<sup>7</sup> Any differences due to rounding