

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL – 10 SEPTEMBER 2015

REPORT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

THE VILLAGE HIERARCHY STUDY STAGE 1 AUGUST 2015

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report presents the outcome of the Village Hierarchy Study Stage 1.
- The report explains that a final village hierarchy will not be agreed until Stage 2 of the Study has been completed.

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL:</u> That Council, via the Executive, be advised that:	
(A)	the Village Hierarchy Study Stage 1 August 2015 be approved as part of the evidence base to inform and support preparation of the East Herts District Plan.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 There is no specific guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on how to undertake a settlement hierarchy. The NPPF is, however, clear that development should be guided toward those settlements that are deemed the most sustainable. Settlements that can provide a range of local facilities and services, or provide reasonable accessibility to higher order settlements to easily access those services, should be considered the most sustainable.
- 1.2 In order to rank the villages of East Herts in terms of sustainability, the approach must focus on those facilities and services that a rural community value.

- 1.3 In the East Herts Draft District Plan Preferred Options Consultation document, villages are identified as Group 1, Group 2 or Group 3 villages. A number of representations were received objecting to the hierarchy set out in the draft Plan. This report presents Stage 1 of a Village Hierarchy Study, the purpose of which is to ensure a consistent approach to villages across the district.
- 1.4 This report presents the methodology used to identify and quantify the villages in terms of sustainability. The methodology, along with the individual village surveys, was sent to Ward Members and Town and Parish Councils in July 2015 for their comments. The report presents the methodology both before and after the consultation and notes where and why changes have been made.
- 1.5 This report presents Stage 1 of a two-stage approach to grouping the villages. Stage 1 simply seeks to identify the services and facilities available in the villages, together with an assessment of accessibility and public transport provision. Stage 2 will present a final hierarchy after considering unique issues such as policy constraints, environmental constraints and school capacity etc.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The Village Hierarchy Study: Stage 1 August 2015 (contained in full at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**) consists of 6 sections. Section 1 introduces the purpose of the study; Section 2 places the study in the context of National Planning Policy.
- 2.2 Section 3 presents which villages are included within the assessment. The 34 villages that have been included are those that are identified as Group 1 or 2 villages in the Draft District Plan and the Category 1 and 2 villages in the 2007 Local Plan Second Review (where these differ). The number of villages within East Herts far exceeds the 34 villages within this study, however, the remaining villages were deemed of a size inappropriate and unsustainable for new development.
- 2.3 Section 4 presents the methodology that was sent to Ward Members and Parish Councils between July 6th and August 3rd. The methodology contains 2 elements:
1. Assessment of Services and Facilities
 2. Assessment of Accessibility and Public Transport Provision

- 2.4 The first element of the methodology (Assessment of Services and Facilities) sets out which services and facilities are awarded points (Table 1: Essential Reference Paper 'B') as well as the number of points each facility is given. Facilities are then categorised as either Primary or Secondary Facilities. Table 2 then applies a weighting to the points dependent on whether they are classified as Primary or Secondary. The weighting allows the methodology to place a greater emphasis on essential facilities that are used on a regular basis.
- 2.5 The second element of the methodology (Assessment of Accessibility and Public Transport Provision) sets out which accessibility and transport provisions are awarded points. Different points are awarded to different accessibility characteristics dependent upon their rural importance.
- 2.6 Section 5 presents the changes made to the methodology following the comments from the Ward Member and Parish Council consultation. Changes were made to one area of the Assessment of Services and Facilities element of the methodology. This is the removal of the "Mobile Library" criterion. The criterion was removed from the final methodology (Appendix 2: Post Consultation Final Methodology) due to the planned withdrawal in October 2015.
- 2.7 Changes were also made to two areas of the Assessment of Accessibility and Public Transport Provision. The level of points awarded for bus provision raised significant concern through the consultation. Two criterion in particular received a number of comments; "No. of different Bus Services" and "Access to Railway Station by Bus Service Suitable for Commute". Both these criteria have been removed from the final methodology (Appendix 2) as bus services are not deemed reliable enough to consistently fulfil these criteria. The level of bus points available is now refined to a lower overall total.
- 2.8 Section 6 concludes The Village Hierarchy Study: Stage 1 August 2015 and explains the next steps that will be undertaken towards the production of a final village hierarchy.
- 2.9 It is important to note at this stage that no decisions have been made on the final village hierarchy. Decisions will be made

following Stage 2 of the Study.

Conclusion

2.10 The Village Hierarchy Study: Stage 1 August 2015 is the first stage of two in providing important evidence to determine the rural strategy in the East Herts District Plan. This paper seeks to provide a sound evidence base which Stage 2 of The Village Hierarchy can build upon.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None

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