

The Village Hierarchy Study:

Stage 1

1. Introduction

The Council is currently preparing its District Plan to help shape a sustainable future for East Herts. This will replace the current 2007 Local Plan Second Review and sets out the spatial planning strategy and policy framework for the District up to 2031.

The council is developing an evidence base to support and inform the preparation of the District Plan. The Village Hierarchy Study will ensure that new development in the rural area is directed towards the most sustainable villages in the district.

The Village Hierarchy Study updates previous work undertaken (Village Audit 2008, Parish Plans, Chapter 4 of the District Plan Supporting Document 2012) and now presents a further comprehensive review, informed through village surveys and engagement with parish councils. The Village Hierarchy Study provides a snapshot in time of both facilities and accessibility to services within the different villages of East Herts to establish their overall level of sustainability.

In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, new development should be located close to services and facilities with good public transport provision. The District Plan development strategy will help to achieve the government's overall objective of sustainable communities by locating housing, jobs and services close together in order to reduce the need to travel. Housing growth should be guided towards those villages that already have a range of services and employment opportunities, and restricted in those that do not.

Growth will be directed mainly, but not solely by the aforementioned process. Stage 1 does not however present the final hierarchy. Following Stage 1 of The Village Hierarchy Study will be a Stage 2; this next stage will inspect and evaluate strategic policy direction, suitability of sites and outstanding development constraints (flooding etc.) alongside individual characteristics of the villages that could affect development. Stage 2 will include the final Village Hierarchy.

This paper briefly reviews the Policy Context for undertaking the Village Hierarchy Study (Section 2). Section 3 presents which villages are being considered within the Hierarchy Study. The methodology used to rank the basic sustainability of each village is presented in Section 4. A period of consultation with Ward Members and Parish Councils was undertaken in July. As a result of the consultation there have been some changes made to the methodology and these are outlined in Section 5. The last chapter highlights the Stage 1 study conclusions and outlines the next stage of the Village Hierarchy Study. Within the Appendix a matrix of the individual village totals can be found, alongside a detailed description of all the services considered within the methodology.

2. Planning Policy Context: National Planning Policy Framework

There is no specific guidance on how to undertake a Village Hierarchy Study. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does however provide some key issues that need to be addressed and in paragraph 158 the NPPF states that:

“Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. Local planning authorities should ensure that their assessment of and strategies for housing, employment and other uses are integrated, and that they take full account of relevant market and economic signals.”

Paragraph 55 of the NPPF states that:

“To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. For example, where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby. Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances...”

Paragraph 70 of the NPPF states that:

“To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;*
- guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community’s ability to meet its day-to-day needs;*
- ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and*
- ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.”*

3. Villages Considered for Study

The villages considered within this study are those identified as Group 1 and 2 villages in the Draft District Plan¹ and Category 1 and 2 villages from the East Herts Local Plan Second Review² (where these differ). East Herts is a rural district, consisting of five market towns and over 100 villages. It would not be appropriate to assess all settlements within the District.

The remaining settlements within the District are considered to be of a size that makes them unsustainable locations for potential new development, they are therefore not assessed within this study.

The 34 villages included in the assessment were:

Aston	High Wych
Bayford	Hunsdon
Benington	Letty Green
Birch Green	Little Hadham
Braughing	Much Hadham
Brickendon	Spellbrook
Cole Green	Standon and Puckeridge
Colliers End	Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets
Cottered	Stapleford
Dane End	Tewin
Datchworth	Thundridge
Furneux Pelham	Tonwell
Great Amwell	Wadesmill
Hadham Ford	Walkern
Hertford Heath	Watton-at-Stone
Hertingfordbury	Westmill
High Cross	Widford

¹ Draft District Plan Villages: <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=29084> – See Chapter 10 ‘Villages’,

² Local Plan Second Review: <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=24645> – See Chapter 17 ‘Other Settlements - The Villages’



Figure 1: The geographical location of villages in East Herts considered for this study

4. Methodology

A scoring system has been formulated which will be used to rank the villages with regard to their overall sustainability. There are two elements to this part of the study. The first is an assessment of the range of services and facilities that a village contains, and the second is an assessment of the village's accessibility to higher order settlements, and the level of public transport provision available. The methodology within this section is identical to the consultation methodology sent to Ward Members and Parish Councils in July.

1. Assessment of Services and Facilities

The services and facilities that have been identified in Table 1 below have been categorised into Primary and Secondary Services and Facilities. Those categorised as Primary Services and Facilities are deemed to be essential for day-to-day requirements, and therefore the scoring criteria has been weighted (Table 2 below) to reflect their importance. Focusing on the importance of services and facilities, and not just on the quantity, ensures a more accurate measure of sustainability.

In order for a service or facility to count towards a village's total, it must be within a 750m radius of the built-up area; this represents a short 5-10 minute walking distance. A point (or more where applicable) is awarded for each service, e.g. if there were 4 A1 shops within a village, 4 points would be awarded etc. Appendix 1 contains a description of each facility and service included within the study.

Table 1: Facilities

Table 1: Facilities		
Facility Type	Service/Facility	Number of Points for each Service (all within settlement)
Primary Facilities	Post Office Facility	1pt – Part-time 2pts – Full-time
	Doctor's Surgery Facility	
	Primary School	2 pts
	Community Building	1pt each
	Convenience Shop	
	Children's Play Area	
Public Playing Field		
Secondary Facilities	Dentist	1pt – Part-time 2pts –Full-time
	Café/Restaurant/Take-away	1pt each
	Place of Worship	
	Public House	
	Other A1 Shop	
	Pre-school/Nursery	
	Pharmacy/Chemist	
	Mobile Library Service	
	Private Recreational Facilities	
	Allotments	
	Petrol Station	

Table 2: Facility Weighting

Facility Type	Additional Weighting (basic number multiplied by)
All Primary	x3
All Secondary	Remains the same

2. Assessment of Accessibility and Public Transport Provision

The accessibility of villages within East Herts is affected by the levels of public transport provision available to residents. Those villages that are best served by public transport can be considered to be more accessible, and hence more sustainable, than more isolated villages. Table 3 displays the accessibility and public transport provision scoring criteria. The table is split into 3 categories; general accessibility, bus provision and railway provision. Higher scores are awarded to railway service provision as railways are fixed transport infrastructure, which makes service provision less subject to service level fluctuations and economic circumstances. Higher scores are also awarded to bus service provision which offers peak hour services on Monday-Friday, enabling a day long visit to be made to a higher order settlement for work or educational purposes. Appendix 2 contains further description of each transport and accessibility type.

Table 3: Transport and Accessibility

	Indicator	Scoring Criteria
General Accessibility	Proximity to nearest Service Town ³ (in miles)	0.0 – 2.0 = 8pts 2.1 – 3.0 = 6pts 3.1 – 4.0 = 4pts 4.1 + = 2pts
Bus Service Provision	No. of Daily Returns (Mon-Fri)	0 – 4 = 2pts 5 – 9 = 4pts 10 – 14 = 6pts 15 – 19 = 8pts 20 + = 10pts
	No. of Daily Returns (Sat)	0 – 4 = 1pt 5 – 9 = 2pts 10 – 14 = 3pts 15 – 19 = 4pts 20 + = 5pts
	Sunday Service (Any time/number)	2pts
	Bus Service suitable for commute ⁴	5pts
	No. of different Bus Services	2pts each
Railway Service Provision	Railway Station within Village	10pts
	Access to Railway Station by bus service suitable for commute ⁵	5pts

³ All distances measured in miles, from centre of village to centre of service town. Centre refers to centre of development/built up area in both cases; not perceived centre of village/town.

⁴ Bus service arriving in Service Town before 9am and departing after 5pm (includes the 5 market towns within East Herts in addition to Harlow, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City)

⁵ Bus service arriving at railway station before 7.30am and departing from railway station after 6.30pm.

5. Parish Council and Ward Member Consultation

Between the 6th July and 3rd August Parish Councils and Ward Members were consulted. Individual village profiles were sent out to be fact-checked to ensure that the information held regarding each of the 34 villages was correct. Corrections have been made where necessary regarding the individual village information. Secondly the draft methodology was also circulated for comment.

Feedback:

The draft methodology mainly received concerns in two areas:

1. A number of comments received raised concern about the provision of bus services in the rural area. It is agreed that this is a valid concern and therefore the following two criteria will be removed from Table 3:

“No. of Different Bus Services”:

- Although a higher number of services are often an indicator of a good bus service provision, this is not the case in a number of villages in East Herts. In September this criterion will have less relevance with the changes to HCC subsidised buses.

“Access to Railway Station by Bus Service Suitable for Commute”:

- Bus service not deemed reliable enough to constantly provide this sort of service.
- Car usage within the villages undermines the use of the buses in this way.

Removing these two criteria constrains the level of points available for buses as a whole and refines the approach toward the more important aspects of a bus service.

2. Concerns were also raised regarding the Mobile Library. Again, it is agreed that this is a valid concern and therefore the following criterion will be removed from Table 1:

“Mobile Library”

- The Mobile Library is to be withdrawn by the end of October across Hertfordshire therefore no longer offering any service.

6. Next Steps

After the consultation the changes described in Section 5 were made to the original methodology in Section 4. The changes have been made to the village point scores in Appendix 3 and an update of Tables 1 and 3 (Section 4) can be found in Appendix 2. Villages have also received updated point scores in regards to the bus changes that will take place in September. These points are based on draft bus timetables and so there may be potential for small-scale change when the timetables come into force in September.

Stage 1 of The Village Hierarchy Study has set out to establish a universal methodology that can establish the basic sustainability of the selected villages of East Herts. The study has provided a comprehensive audit of village facilities and accessibility to higher order services. With the help of Ward Members and Parish Councils the study has provided an important first stage in the evidence base to support the rural strategy.

The next step (Stage 2) will seek to build upon the evidence in this study. It will consider areas that could constrain development in the villages such as land capacity, school capacity and policy direction. It will go on to establish a final Village Hierarchy and will categorise villages into a number of groups dependant on their overall sustainability and ability to accommodate development.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Description of Services and Accessibility Criteria

Facility Type	Facility	Reason for Inclusion/Criteria
Primary Facilities	Post Office	<p>Post offices have traditionally provided a valuable service to rural areas allowing access to a wide range of services. Especially important to the elderly who may not be able to easily travel outside the settlement and/or may not have access to internet services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes independent Post Offices, part-time Post Offices and Post Offices within a shop.
	Doctor Surgery	<p>Access to a doctor is important to provide for the on-going health needs of residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes both permanent surgeries and part-time surgeries.
	Primary School	<p>Reduces the need for children and parents to travel long distances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not include privately funded schools. - Or schools which only cater for a select type of student, (e.g. Students with learning difficulties) as this does not directly serve local need.
	Community Building	<p>Provides a location for community activities and events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indoor hall or larger building, most often used for community events but can also be privately hired.
	Convenience Shop	<p>A general convenience store with a range of food and general goods is seen as a basic requirement and important in determining the sustainability of a settlement. Convenience stores will provide a daily 'top-up' shop of essentials, thus reducing the need to travel.</p>
	Children's Play Area	<p>Designated area for children to play in. Might include climbing frames of varying materials and/or an area of softer flooring.</p>

	Public Playing Field ⁶	<p>Provides green space or recreational facilities for public use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Playing fields, nature reserves, equipped play areas, tennis courts, and sports pitches with changing rooms etc. - Facilities that can be accessed by the community, without having membership to a privately run organisation. - In some cases these facilities can be publically accessible but may require a charge. - Includes both indoor and outdoor facilities.
Secondary Facilities	Dentist	<p>Dentists are an important healthcare facility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes both permanent and part-time surgeries.
	Café/Restaurant/Take-away	<p>Provide residents with a choice of food outlets as well as providing employment opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In some cases Café/Restaurant is deemed to offer separate service despite being within same unit as shop/pub, therefore has been added to the assessment.
	Place of Worship	<p>Plays an important role in community cohesion.</p>
	Public House	<p>Can often be the heart of a local community. In smaller, more isolated settlements pubs may be able to diversify and provide other essential services.</p>
	Other A1 Shop	<p>A variety of shops and retail which again lower the need to travel outside of the village, they differ from other shops by providing comparison goods and some services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes any shop within the A1 use-class.

⁶ In some cases Public and Private Recreational Facilities overlap, every effort has been made to separate and count individually; however in some cases the provision of the facility may be large enough that it is counted both as a Public facility and as (below) a Private facility.

	Pre-school/Nursery	<p>Local childcare can be particularly important for working families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment includes both private childcare facilities as well as nurseries and Pre-school associated with schools.
	Pharmacy/Chemist	<p>Access to a dispensary prevents journeys outside that some may find difficult and is important to the on-going health needs of the residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Includes both pharmacy and dispensary.
	Private Recreational Facilities	<p>Provides access for club members to facilities such as a bowling green, cricket pitches, football pitches, tennis courts, changing rooms etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilities either not normally accessible to the public or where a membership fee is required.
	Allotments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a timeless service that still remains very popular in villages within East-Herts.
	Petrol Station/Garage	<p>Can offer a valuable choice to residents and provide local employment opportunities. Petrol stations will typically provide a range of comparison and convenience goods as well.</p>

Accessibility/Transport Type	Accessibility Criteria	Reason for Inclusion/Criteria
General Accessibility	Proximity to nearest Service Town ⁷	Being within close proximity to a service town enhances the sustainability of a location. It shortens the travel time to employment, schooling and services that a rural community may not be able to provide.
Bus	No. of Daily Returns (Mon-Fri)	Where a settlement has a more frequent bus service, it can be considered more sustainable as they provide residents with a higher level of accessibility to urban areas.
	No. of Daily Returns (Sat)	For residents working during weekdays, a frequent Saturday bus service can provide residents with access to urban areas on the weekends, outside of working hours.
	Sunday Service (Anytime/Number)	An additional service, often symbolic of a more substantial bus service throughout the week.
	Bus Service suitable for commute	A bus service that runs from Monday to Friday and arrives within a town before 9am and has a return service from the town after 5pm provides opportunity to commute to work, this is more sustainable than driving.
Train	Train Station within Village	Faster alternative to bus service also provides access to a broader transport network. As with all train lines in East Herts the service feeds into London, an important commuter service.

⁷ In this case, the term *service town* refers to the 5 towns within East Herts (Bishops Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware) as well as the towns of Harlow, Stevenage and Welwyn G.C. outside of East Herts.

APPENDIX 2: Post-Consultation Final Methodology

Facility Type	Facility	Number of Points for each Facility (all within settlement)
Primary Facilities	Post Office Facility	1pt – Part-time
	Doctor's Surgery Facility	2pts – Full-time
	Primary School	2 pts
	Community Building	1pt each
	Convenience Shop	
	Children's Play Area	
	Public Playing Field	
Secondary Facilities	Dentist	1pt – Part-time 2pts –Full-time
	Café/Restaurant/Take-away	1pt each
	Place of Worship	
	Public House	
	Other A1 Shop	
	Pre-school/Nursery	
	Pharmacy/Chemist	
	Private Recreational Facilities	
	Allotments	
	Petrol Station	

Facility Type	Additional Weighting (basic number multiplied by)
All Primary	x3
All Secondary	Remains the same

Transport Type	Indicator	Scoring Criteria
General Accessibility	Proximity to nearest Service Town ⁸ (in miles)	0.0 – 2.0 = 8pts 2.1 – 3.0 = 6pts 3.1 – 4.0 = 4pts 4.1 + = 2pts
Bus Service Provision	No. of Daily Returns (Mon-Fri)	0 – 4 = 2pts 5 – 9 = 4pts 10 – 14 = 6pts 15 – 19 = 8pts 20 + = 10pts
	No. of Daily Returns (Sat)	0 – 4 = 1pt 5 – 9 = 2pts 10 – 14 = 3pts 15 – 19 = 4pts 20 + = 5pts
	Sunday Service (Any time/number)	2pts
	Bus Service suitable for commute ⁹	5pts
Railway Service Provision	Railway Station within Village	10pts

⁸ All distances measured in miles, from centre of village to centre of service town. Centre refers to centre of development/built up area in both cases; not perceived centre of village/town.

⁹ Bus service arriving in Service Town before 9am and departing after 5pm (includes the 5 market towns within East Herts in addition to Harlow, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City)

APPENDIX 3: Village Points Matrix

	Facilities																	Facility Total	Accessibility									Accessibility Total	Overall Total
	Primary Facilities							Secondary Facilities											Proximity to Nearest Service Town	No. of Daily Returns (Mon-Fri)	No. of Daily Returns (Sat)	Sunday Service (anytime/number)	Bus Service Suitable for Commute	No. of Different Bus Services	Railway Station within Village	Access to railway Station by Bus Service Suitable for Commute			
	Post Office Facility	Doctor's Surgery Facility	Primary School	Community Building	Convenience Shop	Children's Play Area	Public Recreation Area	Dentist	Café/Restaurant/Take-away	Place of Worship	Public House	Other A1 Shop	Pre-school/Nursery	Pharmacy/Chemist	Private Recreational Facilities	Allotments	Petrol Station												
Aston	0	0	6	9	0	3	6	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	1	0	31	4	2	1	0	0		0		7	38	
Bayford	0	0	6	3	0	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	19	4	2	1	0	0		0		7	26	
Benington	0	0	6	3	3	0	3	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	20	2	4	2	0	5		0		13	33	
Birch Green	0	0	6	3	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	17	4	4	1	0	5		0		14	31	
Braughing	6	0	6	9	3	3	3	0	0	2	3	0	1	0	1	1	0	38	4	6	2	0	5		0		17	55	
Brickendon	0	0	0	3	0	3	6	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	15	4	2	1	0	0		0		7	22	
Cole Green	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	4	4	1	0	5		0		14	16	
Colliers End	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	6	2	0	5		0		15	20	
Cottered	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	6	4	1	0	0		0		11	19	
Dane End	6	0	6	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	28	2	4	1	0	5		0		12	40	
Datchworth	3	0	6	6	3	9	6	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	41	2	2	0	0	0		0		4	45	
Furneux Pelham	3	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	15	2	4	1	0	0		0		7	22	
Great Amwell	0	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	14	8	10	5	2	5		0		30	44	
Hadham Ford	3	3	0	3	0	6	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	4	4	1	0	5		0		14	33	
Hertford Heath	0	0	6	3	6	3	3	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	1	1	0	28	8	6	3	0	5		0		22	50	
Hertingfordbury	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	9	8	4	1	0	5		0		18	27	
High Cross	0	0	6	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	16	6	8	2	0	5		0		21	37	
High Wych	3	0	6	3	3	3	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	27	8	2	1	0	0		0		11	38	
Hunsdon	6	3	6	3	3	3	6	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	36	2	10	5	0	5		0		22	58	
Letty Green	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0		0		4	5	
Little Hadham	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	4	8	2	0	5		0		19	26	
Much Hadham	6	6	6	3	3	3	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	1	1	1	1	43	2	4	2	0	5		0		13	56	
Spellbrook	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	8	10	5	2	5		0		30	38	
Standon and Puckeridge	6	6	12	6	9	3	3	0	2	3	4	2	3	1	0	1	1	62	2	8	3	0	5		0		18	80	

Stanstead Abbotts and St Margarets	6	6	6	12	12	12	3	2	5	2	3	12	4	1	3	1	0
Stapleford	0	0	6	3	0	3	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Tewin	3	0	6	9	3	3	3	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	1	0
Thundridge	0	0	6	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Tonwell	0	0	6	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Wadesmill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Walkern	6	3	6	3	3	3	3	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	1	1
Watton-at-Stone	6	6	6	12	6	6	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	1	3	1	0
Westmill	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Widford	0	0	6	3	0	3	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0

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63
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6	10	5	0	5		10	
4	6	2	0	5		0	
6	2	1	0	0		0	
6	6	2	0	5		0	
6	4	2	0	5		0	
6	6	2	0	5		0	
2	4	2	0	5		0	
2	6	2	0	5		10	
8	4	1	0	5		0	
2	4	2	0	5		0	

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