

Interim Village Hierarchy Study (December 2015)

Supplementary Paper/Introduction to Report

- 1.0 The NPPF is clear that development should be guided towards those settlements that can provide a range of local facilities and services, or provide reasonable accessibility to higher order settlements (Paragraphs 55, 70 and 158).
- 2.0 The approach to the establishment of a village hierarchy has been accepted at local plan examinations across the country as an appropriate approach to classifying the sustainability of settlements.
- 3.0 In September 2015 the District Plan Executive Panel supported the recommendation that Stage 1 of the Village Hierarchy Study be approved to inform and support the preparation of the East Herts District Plan. Stage 1 provided a template that measured the basic sustainability of individual villages by providing them with an overall sustainability score.
- 4.0 Following the decision in September and in order to ensure the robustness of the assessment was maximised it was considered necessary to include a wider range of villages within the Study. Therefore an additional 9 villages have been assessed that were originally classified as Group 3 settlements.
- 5.0 This evenings report presents the findings of both stage one and stage two in Essential Reference Paper B on page 29 of the Agenda Papers.
- 6.0 The proposed hierarchy seeks to classify the district's villages into three categories based on sustainability. The policy framework of the emerging District Plan is that a limited amount of development should be located in the most sustainable villages (Group 1).
- 7.0 In order to achieve this, it is considered that Group 1 villages should:
 - have a sufficient number of suitable sites that could reasonably be expected to come forward for development within the District Plan period; and

- have sufficient capacity within the village primary school to cater for limited growth.

Stage two has assessed these matters.

- 8.0 With regard to primary school capacity advice has been sought from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as the local authority with responsibility for education. In both Hertford Heath and Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets HCC has advised that the schools are both at capacity with no opportunity to expand on site. Further details in relation to primary education provision are set out in the attached table.
- 9.0 With regard to land availability the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) has been used. The SLAA considers the suitability and capacity of the sites as well as the impacts of development on heritage assets such as conservation areas and listed buildings, impacts on environmental factors such as flooding and wildlife sites and the effect of development on the Green Belt where applicable. Draft Round 3 SLAA conclusions have been sent out for stakeholder consultation this week with Ward Members, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Plan Groups and site promoters.
- 10.0 In both Hertford Heath and Stanstead Abbots and St. Margarets the SLAA shows that land availability is highly constrained with limited potential to deliver a 10% growth in housing stock, as envisaged by the emerging District Plan. Again, further details are set out in the attached table.

Conclusion

- 11.0 The outcome of the assessment process is that the interim Village Hierarchy Study identifies six Group 1 Villages on the basis of a score of 50 or more points.
- 12.0 The report presents a further interim position which will be the subject of further consultation with the additional nine villages that have now been included in the Study.

Questions Raised

- 13.0 Following publication of the Panel papers a number of questions have been raised about the Study and consequently there are two amendments to bring to Members attention.
- 14.0 Firstly, the sustainability score for Tewin has been reduced by 1 point from 42 to 41 points following withdrawal of its Saturday bus service; this does not affect its grouping. Secondly, the sustainability score for Cole Green has been reduced by 5 points from 16 to 11 points following withdrawal of a commutable bus service to Hertford and consequently it will become a Group 3 Village rather than a Group 2 Village.
- 15.0 Highways impacts have also been raised as a concern. Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has informed us that the level of growth at each village location would not cause any particular traffic issues when considered in isolation. It is acknowledged that there are localised highway problems, however, it should be noted that these are mainly parking issues and not congestion problems caused by weight of traffic. Officers will, however, continue to liaise with HCC up until the production of the Final Village Hierarchy Study.
- 16.0 A further question raised is in relation to the requirement for Group 1 Villages to deliver at least a 10% increase in housing stock over the Plan-period. Whilst it is acknowledged that the number of Group 1 Villages has reduced in number, the Council is not currently proposing to amend the 10% target for the remaining villages.
- 17.0 Others have questioned why '50' has been used as the cut-off point between Group 1 and Group 2 Villages. To assess the robustness of this benchmark sensitivity testing has been undertaken and the ability of those villages scoring 40+ points to accommodate development has been considered. In each case there are reasons why development (beyond infill) would not be achievable as set out in the table attached. This demonstrates that the 50 point benchmark is appropriate.

17th December 2015