Site Specific Policies and Proposals
Development Plan Document

Topic Paper 1: Definition of Settlement Boundaries

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1. Introduction

1.1 This brief Topic Paper has been prepared to explain the background to the delineation of Settlement Boundaries in the Local Plan as Breckland Council continues the process of replacing the Local Plan with the Local Development Framework (LDF). Presently the settlement boundaries as defined in the Breckland Local Plan (1999) remain valid and the associated policy framework has been saved for the purposes of Development Control decisions. The principle of settlement boundaries has been retained in the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Development Plan Document of the LDF.

1.2 The opportunity to revisit the issue of whether a settlement boundary is delineated and subsequently how that settlement boundary is defined will be a fundamental part of the Site Specific Policies and Proposals Development Plan Document which is the subject of consultation throughout 2008 and 2009. This consultation will include debate around the new inset plans and the proposed settlement boundaries. This Topic Paper is intended to provide guidelines for this process so that there is a consistent and transparent approach to what will be one of the more contentious elements of the Breckland Local Development Framework.

2. Purpose of Settlement Boundaries

2.1 Settlement Boundaries are a policy tool which delineate in plan form coherent and established built-up areas. Within the Settlement Boundaries adopted in the Breckland Local Plan (1999) the majority of housing, employment and services development in the District can be found. A list of these settlement boundaries can be found in Appendix A to this Paper.

2.2 The purpose of the settlement boundaries is to consolidate development around existing built-up communities where there is a clearly defined settlement where further development, if properly designed and constructed, would not be incongruous or intrusive because of the size of the settlement. Additionally many of the communities identified with settlement boundaries in Appendix A have a number of services which can underpin the sustainability of further development in that community. To support this approach, and explain the purpose of settlement boundaries, local planning policies have adopted the policy responses identifies in Box A below.

2.3 The emerging Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Document of the LDF confirms that Settlement Boundaries remain a valid policy response in Breckland to achieve the twin objectives of focussing the majority of development towards existing settlements
whilst simultaneously protecting the surrounding countryside. Core Policy 13 of the document sets out the preferred strategic planning approach for sustainable rural communities in Breckland. This approach proposes that Settlement Boundaries will be defined for rural communities where there are at least two of the following key local services; food shop, post office, pub, doctor’s surgery, primary school, and good public transport links or local employment opportunities. Preferred Option CP13 also commits Breckland to review Settlement Boundaries in the Site Specific Policies and Proposals Document. CP13 requires amendments in the review to result in logical and defensible Settlement Boundaries.

Box A: Planning Policy and Settlement Boundaries

- Presumption in favour of development within settlement boundaries subject to local detailed issues such as form & character, access etc
- Exceptionally allowing for development outside of but directly adjoining settlement boundaries where it meets a local need such as affordable housing for local people or local employment.
- Strictly controlling development away from settlement boundaries (i.e. in open countryside) in order to protect the landscape and to reduce the environmental impacts of a dispersed form of development – such as carbon emissions from increased transport

2.4 There are no defined criteria on how to draw up settlement boundaries in National or Regional policy planning which can be used in the Local Development Framework. There are however a number of location specific policies which can be used in determining which settlements have settlement boundaries and how those boundaries are delineated. PPS1 “Sustainable Development” encourages development plans to focus new development in existing centres. It suggests that new development must be located in places where everyone can access services by foot, cycle or public transport. PPS1 also promotes the protection of the wider countryside and landscape. In addition one of the Key Planning Objectives of the supplement to PPS1 on “Planning and Climate Change”, promotes development to be located in areas which reduce the need to travel by the private car. This point is reiterated in PPS3 “Housing”. PPS7 “Sustainable Development in Rural Areas” further supports these aims and states that development in open countryside, away from settlements should be strictly controlled. At a regional level the Regional Plan requires development to maximise the potential for people to form more sustainable relationships between their homes, workplaces and regularly used services and facilities and their means of travel between them.

2.5 In conclusion the purpose of settlement boundaries is to a draw a line around those areas within the District which are an established and coherent built-up area with some form of service provision which supports the sustainability of that community. Within settlement boundaries the principle of further development will be considered
favourably subject to form and character, access, biodiversity and historic environment. As a consequence those areas outside of settlement boundaries will constitute “countryside” for the purposes of planning policy and in these areas development will be strictly controlled to that which is needed to specifically support the rural areas.

3. **Policy Context**

3.1 The main purpose of the Settlement Boundaries will be to identify where certain policies apply. The two principle land uses which will be governed by settlement boundaries are housing and employment. Outside of settlement boundaries planning permission will not be given unless it meets an identified local need or is connected to the rural economy of Breckland. This is consistent with national policy described in Planning Policy Statement 7 “Sustainable Development in Rural Areas”

3.2 Preferred Option DC2 of the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Preferred Options outlines the Council’s preferred policy for assessing applications for residential development. The opening lines of policy declare that within Settlement Boundaries as defined on the proposals map, new housing development will, in principle, be permitted.

4. **Historical Background**

4.1 The origins of settlement boundaries go back to the 1979 Norfolk Structure Plan. That document contained at Policy 3.4.18 the following:

“IN ALL VILLAGES PLANNING PERMISSION MAY BE GIVEN, AT THE DISCRETION OF DISTRICT COUNCILS, FOR INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUPS OF HOUSES WHICH WILL ENHANCE THE FORM AND CHARACTER OF THE VILLAGE.”

4.2 To deliver this policy Breckland Council agreed a programme for the production of “Village Guidelines”. The Breckland Council determined in 1978 that the purpose of Village Guidelines was:

(i) to develop the policies and general proposals of the Norfolk Structure Plan and relate them to precise areas of land;
(ii) to provide a detailed basis for the control of development;
(iii) to provide a detailed basis for co-ordinating and directing both public and private development of land
(iv) to bring local planning issues before the public for discussion and comment.

4.3 In drawing up early Village Guidelines a number of criteria were taken into account by Breckland Council.
The built form of the village itself with particular regard to its landscape setting
opportunities for development within the village; and
existing but unimplemented planning permissions.

4.4 The 1979 Structure Plan identified Necton, Mundford, Beetley and Mattishall as villages for residential estate development. The 1988 Structure Plan continued with identifying Necton and Mundford as villages for residential estate development. In addition Breckland identified Bawdeswell, Mattishall and Saham Toney as villages for estate development.

4.5 The preparation of the Breckland Local Plan from 1993 onwards provided the first attempt to embrace all of the Village Guidelines into one document. The Consultation Draft Local Plan (1994) renamed the village guidelines – settlement boundaries in an attempt to highlight the fact that the boundaries were a policy tool to define the limits of where policies apply.

4.6 With the adoption of the Local Plan in 1999 only was identified Hockering for estate scale residential development. Elsewhere there was a strict policy of tightly drawn settlement boundaries to prevent the spread of development into the countryside. The Inspectors Report into Objections to the Breckland District Local Plan (1998) considered a number of objections requesting individual amendments to Settlement Boundaries. Generally the majority of requests to amend settlement boundaries were dismissed by the Inspector due to two factors. The first issue was the Inspector’s concern that amending the settlement boundary would exacerbate the over-supply of housing. The second issue was the Inspector’s reservation that amending the settlement boundary would not enhance the form and character of the area.

4.7 In addition to cases for individual amendments to settlement boundaries, the Inspector also considered whether Fransham merited a settlement boundary. This was the only village identified in Appendix B where the principle of a settlement boundary was considered. The Inspector concluded that........

“The various groups of dwellings, like the Council Houses at Glebe Close and the houses on the A47 are widely separated and Little Fransham is, in my view, a very small place not large or concentrated enough to justify definition, within the context of this plan, as a settlement.”

5. Historic Delineation of Settlement Boundaries

5.1 The individual village guideline approach originating from the early 1980s and translated into the Settlement Boundary through the preparation of the District wide Local Plan in the 1990s has provided a consistent basis for development control decision making. Settlement boundaries also clearly convey to the public and developers where
future development may be permitted and where it would be refused. Importantly, settlement boundaries allow for consultation on the definition of policy (see Paragraph 3.2 in Section 3 above).

5.2 The Settlement Boundaries contained in the Breckland Local Plan (1999) are largely based on the Village Guidelines of the 1980s and the boundaries defined in the Town Plans. A number were reviewed and amended through the Local Plan process but the majority were a straight replication of the Village Guidelines / Town Plans. They were generally drawn tightly around the extent of existing development with the intention of reducing the rate of development in the villages and maintaining development levels in the towns.

5.3 Monitoring has revealed that development rates in villages has remained relatively consistent in the last eight years since the Local Plan Settlement Boundaries were adopted.

5.4 Generally the Settlement Boundaries include the main built form of the Settlement and are drawn along features such as roads, footpaths, drains, rivers, walls and fences that are identifiable on the ground. Occasionally more arbitrary lines have been used where there is no identifiable physical feature on the ground.

5.5 Often there are individual or small groups of buildings that are divorced from the main settlement either by countryside or a physical feature such as a railway line, river or road. Generally these buildings have been excluded from the settlement boundary.

5.6 A number of important physical features which contribute to the character of a settlement have also been excluded from the settlement boundary where they lie at the edge of the village. Such features include village churches and areas of open land such as village greens, cemeteries and playing fields. The redevelopment of these areas is prohibited in any event, however, their exclusion from the settlement boundary affords them additional protection.

5.7 The majority of farms and farm buildings lie in the open countryside. However, there are instances where they are located within or on the edge of the main built up area of a village or town. Farm buildings can often make a significant contribution to the character of the area. During the preparation of the Local Plan many farm buildings were excluded from the settlement boundary because it was considered that their inclusion would result in residential redevelopment contrary to policies which sought to secure the economic re-uses in the first instance. Many farm buildings adjoining the settlement boundary have in any event now been converted for residential uses and a review of boundaries as part of the LDF presents an opportunity to consider whether these buildings are included within a new boundary. There still remains a number of farm buildings, including large modern structures, which adjoin settlement boundaries and a consistent
approach will need to be taken. The exclusion of such buildings from the Settlement Boundary does not preclude their conversion to suitable alternative uses where other policies permit re-use to economic, tourism or farm diversification uses.

5.8 Settlement boundaries have also been drawn taking into account various biodiversity designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR). Where these are on the edge of a settlement they have been excluded from the settlement boundary to afford them greater protection. A similar approach has been taken to Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs).

5.9 Within the District there are approximately 30 parishes that contain largely sporadic development with occasional small concentrations of dwellings. On this basis these villages do not have a settlement boundary in the Local Plan because the District Council considered that it was important to retain the small-scale and often informal nature of these concentrations and their settings. Those settlements which do not have a settlement boundary are listed in Appendix B.

6. **Emerging Method for Delineation of Settlement Boundaries**

6.1 The policy framework at the national and regional level against which the LDF will be prepared has a stronger emphasis on service provision and development being concentrated at those locations where there is an ability for new development to access services without relying on the private car. This is outlined in Section 2. Despite 31% of housing development (1251 dwellings) in Breckland having been built in villages over the past 6 years, this has not prevented a decline in rural service provision. Numerous rural pubs and shops have closed in Breckland since the Local Plan was drafted in 1994 despite some parishes seeing a significant increase in development compared to previous decades. The wider socio-economic factors which have reduced the availability of rural services are now being compounded by national policy such as the recent Post Office closure programme. The review of settlement boundaries will need to take account of service provision. Additionally, in Parishes where services remain, the delineation of Settlement Boundaries will need to take account of distance of an area of a village from those services.

6.2 In addition to national and regional guidance the delineation of Settlement Boundaries will need to take into account the Core Policies listed in the Breckland Core Strategy and Development Control Policies DPD. Preferred Option CP6 requires new development to minimise the loss of productive agricultural land. Therefore Settlement Boundaries should not be delineated to include areas of productive agricultural land. Preferred Option CP8 requires the protection of various environmental designations, therefore Settlement Boundaries in rural
areas should not be reviewed to include these designations. Preferred Option CP12 on accessibility further requires development and growth to be located in areas which are served by public transport and have accessibility to services. Therefore Settlement Boundaries should not be delineated in areas remote from services and public transport.

6.3 Core Policy 13 of the emerging Core Strategy sets out Breckland Council’s preferred approach to rural communities and the issue of village settlement boundaries. The policy proposes that villages with less than 2 key services should not have a defined Settlement Boundary. On this basis it is considered that some rural communities with a settlement boundary no longer constitute a sustainable location for development. These settlements will require particular scrutiny and debate on whether they should retain settlement boundary if further development is going to conflict with national, regional and local strategies on development, access to services and environmental impact.

6.4 There have been numerous requests as part of the LDF that settlement boundaries should be reviewed to correlate with either Conservation Areas or the designated speed limits. Such approaches would inevitably result in larger areas being included within a boundary and exposed to the prospect of development. It is important to remember that Settlement Boundaries are planning policy tools defining an area within which certain policies will apply. They are not an attempt to define the social extent of the village nor are they a comment on its social identity. Dwellings lying outside of a settlement boundary are often just as much a part of the village’s social identity as those within it. The fact that some settlements do have settlement boundaries does not mean that they do not have a social or communal identity.

7. Policy Implications of Settlement Boundaries

7.1 There are a number of preferred policies in the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Preferred Options that have reference to Settlement Boundaries.

7.2 As mentioned previously Preferred Option CP13 sets out the criteria for the definition of Settlement Boundaries in rural areas.

7.3 Preferred Option DC2 states that new housing will be permitted within Settlement Boundaries subject to other policy considerations

7.4 Preferred Option DC5 requires affordable housing exception sites to be adjacent to the Settlement Boundary.
7.5 In other Preferred Options where the word ‘countryside’ is used, this refers to an area outside of the Settlement Boundary.

8. **What is a Settlement Boundary amendment and what is an allocation?**

8.1 A Settlement Boundary amendment will be a minor change to a settlement boundary in line with the criterion set out in Preferred Option CP13. As described in Section 6 amendments will have to be in accordance with national, regional and local policy.

8.2 An allocation is an area of land which is positively identified in the Site Specific Policies and Proposals document, the Thetford Area Action Plan or the Snetterton Area Action Plan to deliver a certain land use over the duration of the plan. An allocation could be for housing, rural affordable housing, employment uses, retail uses, social infrastructure and open space. Allocations can be within or outside of settlement boundaries, and they can be on greenfield or brownfield land. Where an allocation is outside of a Settlement Boundary, the settlement boundary will normally be extended to encompass the allocation. An allocation will normally have additional policies attached to it to influence the detail of development.

9. **Options Available**

9.1 The fundamental alternative to Settlement Boundaries is not to define any in Breckland. This option was tested in the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies and was deemed unsustainable and undeliverable as it will create unacceptable uncertainty for developers and residents as to where development will occur. It will also have the effect of slowing down the development control process resulting in long delays for those seeking certainty from the planning system on which to base business, service or personal decisions.

9.2 The options for settlement boundary delineation will come from Preferred Option CP13. These options are around whether villages meet the criteria listed in the policy to retain a settlement boundary or gain a settlement boundary and where a village retains a settlement boundary will it need to be amended in line with the guidelines listed in Section 6 above.

9.3 This Topic Paper accompanies a consultation which seeks answers to the following options:

(1) Are there existing settlement boundaries which should be removed because:
   (a) the settlement is no longer a sustainable location, consistent with National and Regional strategies, to accommodate further development; and/or
(b) the built form of the settlement has reached its capacity to accommodate further development over the past 10 years and is of a size/scale together with an absence of services which means there is no policy purpose to retain a settlement boundary.

(2) Are there existing settlements which should have a settlement boundary but currently do not have one because:
(a) the settlement has a sufficiently coherent built-up area and level of services where further development would be sustainable and would integrate with the form and character of the settlement; and/or
(b) a settlement boundary would provide greater certainty over where development is likely or not likely to take place.

(3) Are there existing settlements which should retain their settlement boundary but these need amending because:
(a) the boundary no longer reflects what is on the ground because new development has taken place or the boundary does not correlate to a feature on the ground (hedgerow, fence, back of properties); or
(b) the boundary needs to be drawn tighter in some places to remove the prospect of development (infill / backland); or
(c) the boundary needs to be drawn looser in some places to allow the settlement to breathe and enable further small-scale development (less than 5 houses or 500sqm employment development) to take place in a way which reflects the local form and character.

9.4 To respond to these questions, Town and Parish Councils and local residents should draw upon the information contained in this Paper.

10. Conclusions

10.1 Settlement Boundaries are an established and familiar planning policy tool which many communities support in principle as a way of controlling development. Many investment decisions ranging from economic multi-million decisions through to the exchange of contracts on a domestic property will be informed by the location of the settlement boundary. For many Breckland residents the settlement boundary offers a security of where will be developed and where will not be developed.

10.2 In conclusion, Breckland Council will continue to define Settlement Boundaries as a way of translating National, Regional and Local policies to precise areas of land and to provide a consistent basis for decision making in terms of planning applications. The existing settlement boundaries have been defined in the Local Plan for those settlements which were consistent with the then strategy for the location of development. The detail of where the settlement boundary been drawn up taking into account the built form of the settlement, its physical character and landscape setting.
Appendix A

Settlements with Settlement Boundaries in the Breckland Local Plan

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ashill</th>
<th>Little Dunham</th>
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<tr>
<td>Banham</td>
<td>Little Ellingham</td>
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<td>Bawdeswell</td>
<td>Longham</td>
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<td>Beeston</td>
<td>Lyng</td>
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<td>Beetley</td>
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<td>Old Beetley</td>
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<td>Besthorpe</td>
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<td>Billingford</td>
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<td>Bintree</td>
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<td>Blo Norton</td>
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<td>Bradenham</td>
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<td>Brisley</td>
<td>North Pickenham</td>
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<td>Carbrooke</td>
<td>Old Buckenham</td>
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<td>Caston</td>
<td>Ovington</td>
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<td>Cockley Cley</td>
<td>Oxborough</td>
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<td>Colkirk</td>
<td>Reymerston</td>
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<td>Croxton</td>
<td>Rockland All Saints / St Peter</td>
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<td>East Tuddenham</td>
<td>Roudham (Harling Road)</td>
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<td>Elsing</td>
<td>Rougham</td>
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<td>Foulden</td>
<td>Saham Toney</td>
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<td>Foxley</td>
<td>Scarning</td>
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<td>Garboldisham</td>
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<td>Garvestone</td>
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<td>Gooderstone</td>
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<td>Sparham</td>
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<td>Weasenham All Saints / St Peter</td>
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<td>Yaxham (Clint Green)</td>
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<td>Little Cressingham</td>
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Those Parishes highlighted are those with less than 2 key local facilities. Key local facilities are defined as:
- Primary School
- Post Office
- Food Shop (including farm shop)
- Primary Care facilities
- Daily Public Transport using a fixed route to employment and higher order facilities
Appendix B

Settlements without Settlement Boundaries in the Breckland Local Plan

- Bodney
- Breckles
- Brettenham
- Blytham
- Cranwich
- Cranworth
- Didlington
- East Bilney
- Fransham
- Gasthorpe
- Gateley
- Hardingham
- Hoe
- Horningtoft
- Illington
- Lexhams
- Lynford
- Narford
- Newton
- Northacre (Caston)
- Oxwick
- Quidenham
- Roudham (village)
- Rushford
- South Acre
- Southburgh
- South Pickenham
- Stanford
- Sturston
- Thuxton
- Tottington
- West Tofts
- Worthing

Those Parishes highlighted are those with more than 2 key local facilities.
Key local facilities are defined as:
- Primary School
- Post Office
- Food Shop (including farm shop)
- Primary Care facilities
- Daily Public Transport using a fixed route to employment and higher order facilities