

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive to the LDF TASK & FINISH GROUP – 22 SEPTEMBER 2009

(Authors: David Spencer, Principal Planning Policy Officer & James Stone, Senior Planning Policy Officer)

Breckland Local Development Framework: Site Specifics Policies and Proposals – Proposed Preferred Sites for Watton and East Harling

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members on the proposed preferred sites for Watton and East Harling together with the reasonable alternative sites, both of which should be the subject of further public consultation when the Council publishes its Site Specific Policies and Proposals Preferred Sites Document in 2010.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Group considers the contents of the report and provides their observations to inform the final content of the document to be agreed by the Council's Cabinet for public consultation.

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. Information, Issues and Options

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The Council is committed to producing a document which will set out the Site Specific Policies and Proposals for the 3 market towns of Dereham, Swaffham and Watton and the rural parishes. Given the significant growth planned for Thetford, Attleborough and Snetterton, these will be the subject of separate Area Action Plans setting out the site specific policies and proposals for those documents.
- 3.1.2 The Council has already undertaken two previous Issues and Options consultations on possible sites in preparing the Site Specifics document. The first Issues and Options consultation was a 12 week period from June to September 2008. This was followed by a second 6 week Issues and Options consultation on further sites in February / March 2009. These documents included a total of some 850 sites for comment by agencies, public bodies, developers and the local community. The criteria for assessing sites have also been consulted on during this time and specific observations have been provided by the Highways Authority and other Departments within Breckland Council (Contaminated Land, Strategic Housing).
- 3.1.3 The consultations to date have enabled Capita Symonds to assess the sites and develop a comprehensive site assessment database. This work has enabled the identification of preferred sites to deliver the scale of growth identified in the Core Strategy. In addition to preferred sites, reasonable alternative sites have also been identified to enable further consultation and ensure that communities and agencies have a further input into the process. As reported previously, there has been a significant over-subscription of possible development land. The Site Specifics document will need to find land for some 1,400 new homes and 2,700 jobs together with associated infrastructure. In addition the settlement boundary review process will need to be undertaken in the context of accommodating some 3,000 homes on rural windfall sites. To date, land with an area that could accommodate in excess of

23,000 homes has been put forward. The current task is to refine the number of sites downwards to those sites which offer the most sustainable option, which are deliverable and which meet the requirements of Core Strategy.

3.1.4 The next stages for the Site Specifics Document will include a further 6 week consultation on the preferred sites, the reasonable alternative sites and amended settlement boundaries. The comments from this consultation will need to be considered by Breckland Council and amendments made where necessary. Members should note that this consultation does not present an opportunity to submit further sites. Following consultation on preferred sites the next stage will be to publish the proposed submission version of the document to Government, which will involve a further 6 week opportunity for people to submit representations on the soundness of the document. Following this the document will be submitted to the Secretary of State and there will then be an Examination in Public with a Government Inspector, similar to the recent Core Strategy examination.

3.2 Process for selecting Preferred Sites and Reasonable Alternatives

3.2.1 As reported above, a significant number of sites have been presented to Breckland Council for consideration. At previous consultation stages, the Council has sought to assist communities, landowners and developers by providing a guide as to whether sites have a reasonable, possible or unreasonable prospect of being allocated for development. This broad assessment was made primarily on the basis of how the site accorded (or not) with the Core Strategy. As the Core Strategy is now significantly advanced it is sensible to give that document significant weight. On that basis a number of sites can be deselected at an early stage as being unreasonable because their location does not meet the Core Strategy or there are fundamental policy reasons which render the site undeliverable (i.e. flood risk, safe highways access, environmental considerations).

3.2.2 On this basis the sites in Watton and East Harling identified in Appendix A have been concluded to be unreasonable sites and will not be further tested in the preparation of the Site Specific Policies and Proposals DPD.

3.2.3 After removing the unreasonable sites, Capita Symonds has undertaken a thorough assessment of the remaining sites. Each site has been the subject of a comprehensive desk-based assessment using information held on the Council's GIS (i.e. archaeological records, flood risk, land quality etc). The desk based analysis has been augmented by site visits to each site by Capita Symonds' Planning Policy Officers, Tree and Landscape Officers and NCC Highways Officials. Site visits have enabled greater consideration to be given to the impact on neighbouring uses, environmental and transport issues specific to the site and landscape and amenity assessments to be made. Data from site visits has been recorded in the site assessment database (see Appendix D) and used to inform the overall assessment.

3.2.4 As a rule of thumb, those sites with no or the least issues associated with them have been identified as the preferred option. These sites are well related to existing communities, facilities and are deliverable in terms of infrastructure capacity, highways and environmental factors. However, it is required that the Local Planning Authority also considers and presents for consultation, reasonable alternative sites which could accommodate the proposed level of development. The reasonable alternative sites will have issues associated with them. Whilst these issues are not insurmountable there will inevitably be consequences associated with developing them that makes them less sustainable than the preferred option within the context of the information available at present. Further consultation will test whether this is the case and whether further amendments need to be made.

3.3 Proposals for Watton and Harling

3.3.1 The following table outlines the development needs of Watton and Harling as identified in the Breckland Core Strategy.

Settlement	Housing Allocation Required in Policy CP1	Housing Permitted Outside Existing Settlement Boundary	Remainder Left to Allocate	Approximate Land Requirement
Watton	300	48	252	8.4 hectares
Harling	50	10	40	1.3 hectares

Table 1. Development needs in Watton and Harling, September 2009.

Watton

- 3.3.2 Watton has been identified as a market town in the Core Strategy which will accommodate modest housing and employment growth arising from predominantly local need so as to reduce the volume of out commuting and the potential relocation of existing businesses. The Strategy originally required that allocations are made for approximately 300 dwellings, although this figure has since been reduced to 252 because planning permission has been granted for 48 units outside of the settlement boundary along Norwich Road . The Core Strategy requires that sites are well integrated with the established built up area of the town in order to minimise the impact on the countryside and local wildlife, particularly Wayland Wood and the Breckland SPA.
- 3.3.3 Whilst identified as a market town, limited housing growth is being proposed in order to reflect the level of services and facilities available. Additionally, evidence indicates that there is limited potential for further economic growth in Watton and that the town mainly supports local businesses. Large scale growth runs the risk of undermining the small market town character of Watton which is derived from the historic and attractive nature of the town centre and from the varied countryside that surrounds the town. Particular concerns would accompany any growth to the west and south-west of the town because of the impact on European protected species (the Stone Curlew buffer zone).
- 3.3.4 There is sufficient infrastructure capacity to accommodate the proposed 250 new dwellings. Evidence from infrastructure studies and utility capacity work demonstrates that the preferred development sites in Watton are deliverable. Whilst they will require localised upgrades to the utility networks, there are no critical capacity issues or insurmountable barriers to development of this scale. In addition there will be a need to upgrade primary school education provision and healthcare provision to meet the expanded population. The scale of the upgrades is incremental and involves expanding existing provision rather than new facilities. Therefore contributions from development will be sought to secure off-site provision in accordance with Policy CP5 of the Core Strategy. The existing secondary school (Wayland High) is considered to have sufficient capacity to absorb the anticipated growth in population.
- 3.3.5 All proposed development areas in Watton would drain to Watton WWTW, which has the required capacity in terms of the Dry Weather Flow (DWF) to accommodate the projected growth up to 2026. The Stage 1 Water Cycle Study states that in terms of wastewater network capacity development is best located to the west of the town. However, this is not possible due to the proximity of the Breckland SPA. It is likely that strategic infrastructure will be required should development be located in any other areas due to existing sewer flooding problems and lack of capacity. With regard to water resources and supply, the extra demand exerted by the proposed development could be met by the Carbrooke borehole source near Watton. However, it is expected that upgrades to the existing water supply infrastructure will be required for all development areas.

- 3.3.6 There are a small number of sites within the established built up area of Watton which may become available for development in future years, but none of sufficient size to accommodate the number of dwellings required. To meet the Core Strategy requirement for new housing it will therefore be necessary to identify new 'greenfield' sites for development.
- 3.3.7 The north-west of the town and parts of the south-west are at risk from fluvial flooding. There are large areas of flood zone 3a which cover a number of promoted sites. There have been a number of historic sewer flooding events in and around the town centre. Development to the east of the town could exacerbate these issues unless suitable sewer infrastructure is delivered and appropriate measures are introduced to limit foul water entering the sewers.
- 3.3.8 The findings of the Habitats Regulations Assessment and the existence of a Stone Curlew Special Protection Area means that development towards the west of Watton is not acceptable.

Harling

- 3.3.9 Harling has been identified as one of four larger villages in the District which will accommodate modest estate scale growth. The Core Strategy states that Harling will receive an allocation of 50 new homes. This figure has since been reduced to 40 because planning permission has been granted for 10 units outside the existing settlement boundary along Lopham Road. The Core Strategy requires that sites are well integrated with the established built up area of the village in order to minimise the impact on the countryside.
- 3.3.10 During the preparation of the Core Strategy it became established that there are no known capacity issues relating to the services and infrastructure in Harling for the allocated growth. It is anticipated that the scale of growth in Harling can be accommodated within existing water and electricity infrastructure and school and doctor capacity. Local balance between homes and jobs will be secured through the continued provision of services in the village and the retention of the nearby Roudham Industrial Estate as a protected General Employment Area. In addition to these core services, the village also contains a sport and social club and a village hall. Furthermore, limited growth in Harling is considered acceptable because of the access from the B1111 to the A11 and the commuter rail service from Harling Road station to Norwich. The local bus service includes a route to Norwich with one return service a day.
- 3.3.11 There are no known water and utilities capacity issues in Harling. With regard to flood risk, the River Thet flows to the west of the village and there are areas of Flood Zone 3a to the south and west of Harling.
- 3.3.12 There are a small number of sites within the established built up area of Harling which may become available for development in future years, but none of sufficient size to accommodate the number of dwellings required. To meet the Core Strategy requirement for new housing it will therefore be necessary to identify new 'greenfield' sites for development.
- 3.3.13 The landscape Character Assessment identifies East Harling Fen to the north of the village as having a high landscape character area sensitivity, the middle Harling open Valley Floor as having a moderate/high landscape character area sensitivity and the East Harling heathlands that immediately surround most of the village and extend to the east as having a moderate landscape character area sensitivity. Areas of high biodiversity importance lie to the north of the village (East Harling Common SSSI) and to the south (Middle Harling Fen SSSI).

Conclusions

3.3.14 Appendix B presents the preferred sites and reasonable alternative sites in Watton and Appendix C does the same for East Harling. These appendices are presented in a style which will eventually form the consultation document on preferred sites together with the introductory text provided in Section 3.3 above. The detailed site assessment database which informed the selection of sites is presented at Appendix D. Subject to observations from this Panel and the decision of the Cabinet, an initial sustainability appraisal report and Habitats Regulation Assessment will be prepared to accompany the consultation.

3.2.4 Members should note that all of the sites presented have been submitted to the Local Planning Authority during previous consultations with the exception of the land to the south of Norwich Road (former MOD site). Whilst this land has not formally been submitted by a landowner or developer as part of the LDF, it is nonetheless presented as an Officer recommendation. The site is located between existing development (including the recent redevelopment of the RAF Watton technical site) and presents a strategic opportunity to address an under-provision of open space in the Norwich Road parts of Watton and Carbrooke parishes.

3.3 Options

3.3.1 Report is for consideration by this Panel and Members are requested to provide observations on the sites presented.

3.4 Reasons for Recommendation(s)

3.4.1 To ensure there is robust and transparent scrutiny of the proposed preferred sites and reasonable alternative sites presented for future public consultation as part of the Local Development Framework.

4. Risk and Financial Implications

4.1 Risk

4.1.1 A Risk Management questionnaire has been completed and confirms that risk has been given careful consideration, and that there are no significant risks identified associated with the information in this report.

4.2 Financial

4.2.1 This report has no financial implications.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 Statutory Instrument 2008 No. 1371 Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 sets out the procedures to which the LDF process must adhere.

6. Other Implications

- a) Equalities: None – Matters in this report have no equalities impact.
- b) Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998: None
- c) Section 40, Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006: None
- d) Human Resources: None
- e) Human Rights: None
- f) Other: None

7. Alignment to Council Priorities

7.1 PPS12 deals with the Local Development Framework, including arrangements for

consultation and participation. The statement will need to be taken into account throughout the production of the Local Development Framework and its components and will be relevant to the following Council priorities:

- Building Safer and Stronger Communities
- Environment
- Prosperous Communities
- Your Council, Your Services

8. Ward/Community Affected

8.1 This report directly affects the Wards of Watton, Templar and Harling and Heathlands and the Parishes of Watton, Carbrooke and East Harling.

Key Decision Status (Executive Decisions only):

This is not a Key Decision as indicated on the Forward Plan.

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A – Unreasonable Sites

Appendix B – Sites in Watton

Appendix C – Sites in Harling

Appendix D – Site Assessment Database