



12 Review of Settlement Boundaries

Introduction

12.1 In addition to allocating land to deliver the Core Strategy, the Site Specific Policies and Proposals DPD will also review the existing 109 settlement boundaries identified on the saved Local Plan Proposals Map. As set out in the previous sections of this document the Council considers that, consistent with national and regional policy and the emerging Breckland LDF Core Strategy, that land bids for allocations of market housing in non Local Service Centre villages will be considered as unreasonable options. Therefore the issues and options for site specifics in the the villages will relate to issues around whether settlement boundaries are delineated and the detail around how they are defined.

12.2 The Breckland LDF Core Strategy at Core Policy 13 confirms that settlement boundaries remain a valid planning policy response in Breckland, helping to ensure that the majority of development is directed to existing settlements whilst simultaneously protecting the surrounding countryside. Increasingly it will be necessary to focus development in those settlements that offer sustainable local services to meet day to day needs and thereby reduce the need to travel. On this basis Core Policy 13 presents the opportunity to remove settlement boundaries from the smallest settlements lacking in local services. This approach is considered to be in accordance with national and regional policies which discourage more infill housing development in very small settlements with few or no facilities.

12.3 To accompany this Issues and Options consultation the Council has prepared a Topic Paper on the Definition of Settlement Boundaries. The Topic Paper can be viewed on-line via the LDF pages of the Breckland Council website. The Topic Paper sets out in detail the purpose of settlement boundaries, their historical background and the policy implications arising from settlement boundaries. This section of the Issues and Options document is a summary of the Topic Paper and focuses on the options available for settlement boundaries in Breckland.

12.4 Settlement boundaries are a policy tool to delineate in plan form coherent and established built up areas within which further development, will in principle, be permitted. Generally, settlement boundaries define where open market housing will be allowed provided that the development is in keeping with the form and character of the area and can be appropriately accessed and serviced. By defining settlement boundaries, the areas outside of the boundary are recognised for the purposes of planning policy as countryside where new development will be strictly controlled.

12.5 Early in 2007 as part of the "Development Choices" consultation on the Draft Core Strategy a number of options were presented around the principles of settlement boundaries. We asked as part of that consultation whether we should remove settlement boundaries altogether and adopt a character based approach to new development. The majority of respondents did not support this idea and further consultation has confirmed that settlement boundaries as a means of controlling development are supported by local communities. We also suggested removing settlement boundaries for all villages except the 12 larger Local Service Centre villages. Again the majority of respondents rejected this option. Finally we asked whether we should remove settlement boundaries for those smaller communities without facilities. The majority of respondents did not support this option. Further work on the Core Strategy has demonstrated that restricting further open market housing in some of the smaller settlements with no facilities is the most sustainable option for Breckland, providing the best opportunity to protect the landscape and reduce greenhouse gases from the need to travel by private car.

Issue: Removal of Existing Settlement Boundaries

12.6 When settlement boundaries were delineated in the mid-1990s during the drafting of the adopted Local Plan the emphasis was on defining the extent of coherent built-up areas and protecting the countryside from sporadic development. Since then the role of settlement boundaries has shifted at a national and regional level in terms of being a mechanism to secure sustainable development. Focusing new market housing development to



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locations with reasonable day-to-day facilities is seen as a key way in which the Planning System can help reduce contributions to climate change, protect the countryside and landscape and increase the proportion of homes which have access to services and facilities by means other than the private car.

12.7 In order to protect Breckland's landscape and biodiversity, reduce carbon emissions and limit rural isolation the most sustainable response would be to consolidate most development around existing communities where there are key local facilities. It is proposed that those communities with two key local facilities should retain a settlement boundary. Key local facilities in Breckland are defined as follows: a primary school, a food shop (including a farm shop), a post office, a pub and a doctors. In addition settlement boundaries will be defined for those settlements with good public transport links or local employment opportunities. A list of those settlements that do not have at least two key facilities are listed in Appendix 3 'Settlements with Less than Two Key Facilities'. It is proposed at this stage that to consult on whether we remove the settlement boundary from these settlements.

Option 1

Should we keep settlement boundaries for some / all of the settlements highlighted in Appendix 3 'Settlements with Less than Two Key Facilities'. Given they are not sustainable locations for further market housing there is an option to remove the settlement boundary.

If you disagree with the removal of a settlement boundary please name the settlement boundary you wish to see retained and any evidence to support your position.

Issue: Introducing New Settlement Boundaries

12.8 Approximately 30 parishes in Breckland do not have settlement boundaries because they contain largely sporadic development with only occasional and small concentrations of development. These parishes are listed in Appendix 4 'Settlements Currently with No Settlement Boundaries'. At the time of preparing the Local Plan in the 1990s only the omission of a settlement boundary for Little Fransham was contested. The Government Inspector agreed with Breckland that there was an insufficient concentration of development at Little Fransham to justify a settlement boundary. Using the criteria of having 2 key local services and good public transport it would be a reasonable option as part of the LDF to consider whether Little Fransham should have a settlement boundary. Elsewhere the absence of local facilities and the need to protect the small-scale and often informal nature of smaller settlements means that introducing additional settlement boundaries is unlikely to represent the most sustainable option. To help communities decide whether introducing a new settlement boundary is appropriate, the following table of advantages and disadvantages has been provided.



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	Advantages	Disadvantages
Form and Character	A settlement boundary would clarify where development would be acceptable in principle and provide protection for those areas outside of the boundary.	Defining a settlement boundary will result in further development. For many small rural communities the character is often one of dispersed development and it will be difficult to draw a logical boundary without excluding areas of garden land, small parcels of land and traditional rural buildings.
Retaining existing services	Additional development within a settlement boundary may help retain existing services.	There are no guarantees that allowing occasional development in small rural settlements will retain existing services or introduce new ones.
Protecting the Landscape and	There has been confusion in the past in those villages without settlement boundaries as to where development should or should not take place. This confusion has meant that some communities without settlement boundaries have actually seen more development than those villages that have a boundary. A settlement boundary should provide clarity on where development is acceptable in principle.	The landscape of Breckland should be protected for its own sake irrespective of whether a site is inside or outside of a settlement boundary. For many small rural communities the character is often one of dispersed development and it will be difficult to draw a logical boundary without including areas of land or buildings which contribute significantly to the local landscape character.

Table 12.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Settlement Boundaries

Options

Option 2

Identify a new settlement boundary for Little Fransham as a community which has 2 key local facilities and good public transport.

Option 3

Identify new settlement boundaries for some or all of the settlements listed in Appendix 4 .

If you agree with the introduction of a new settlement boundary please name the settlement boundary you wish to see introduced and any evidence to support your position.

Issue: Amending Existing Settlement Boundaries

12.9 Existing settlement boundaries as identified in the saved Adopted Local Plan evolved from the village guidelines originally drawn up in the 1980s. In recent years there has been a strong demand for development at a time when national policies have sought to protect the countryside from development. Conversely national policy designates garden land as 'brownfield' and has promoted higher density development to ensure the most efficient use of land. This scenario has resulted in significant levels of infill development in the villages and increasing



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concerns over "garden grab" development having a detrimental impact on the character of Breckland's rural settlements. In the last 6 years, some 1,250 new houses have been built in Breckland villages, which is a third of all housing development in the District over this period.

12.10 Previous LDF consultation on the Core Strategy in 2005 revealed that only 14% of respondents supported the idea of significant levels of development in villages and the rural areas. Following up this consultation in 2007 the majority of respondents supported the retention of settlement boundaries in principle although it is clear from public consultation that there are two options available through the Local Development Framework when reviewing settlement boundaries. Some communities want to see tighter settlement boundaries which rule out the potential for back gardens, farm buildings and land on the edge of villages coming forward for market housing development. Other communities have a preference for looser settlement boundaries which could include larger gardens and buildings and land on the edge of villages in order to allow that community to grow, support existing facilities and avoid 'cramming' within tightly defined boundaries. The following table has been prepared to help your response to this issue.



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	Tighter Settlement Boundaries		Looser Settlement Boundaries	
	Advantages	Disadvantages	Advantages	Disadvantages
Form and character	Reduce amount of infill development including backland and garden sites.	Inhibits development and the ability for well-designed schemes to come forward.	Allowing for occasional development on the edge of villages will take the pressure off further infilling. All developments regardless of location should take account of the form and character of their setting.	Previously farm buildings and small parcels of land on the edge of villages have been excluded as they contribute to the form and character. Loosening settlement boundaries to include such sites will increase the likelihood of their re-development for housing.
Landscape	The landscape character will be protected from further development.	Further cramming within tight boundaries may result in schemes which harm the visual approaches to settlements, resulting in a dense and semi-urban edge to villages.	Extending settlement boundaries to include brownfield sites and some peripheral forms of development (eg modern farm buildings) may have a beneficial impact on the landscape.	Allowing development to extend from current settlement boundaries into surrounding areas of countryside will in a significant number of cases have a harmful impact on the local landscape.
Sustainability of rural services and facilities	The evidence on the sustainability of rural services indicates that they are dependent on wider market factors and other plans and programmes outside of the direct control of the planning system. Further occasional development is unlikely to improve service provision. Restricting development in those locations with few services will limit the number of journeys and contributions to climate change.	Restricting development may affect the vitality and viability of rural businesses although there is no local Breckland evidence to support this.	Allowing for some additional development may support the vitality and viability of rural businesses although there is no local Breckland evidence to support this.	The evidence on the sustainability of rural services indicates that they are dependent on wider market factors and other plans and programmes outside of the direct control of the planning system. There are no guarantees that allowing for further development will underpin rural service provision.

Table 12.2 Tighter and Looser Settlement Boundaries



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Options

Option 4

Settlement boundaries should be drawn tighter around existing development to protect the landscape and built character of the settlement and to reduce the amount of new market house development in villages. Tighter settlement boundaries would mean drawing the boundary to exclude large gardens and isolated properties and farm buildings on the edge of existing settlement boundaries.

Option 5

Settlement boundaries should be drawn looser around existing development to enable more small-scale market housing development (schemes up to 5 houses) to take place in those villages with key local facilities and services. Looser settlement boundaries will still need to be drawn having regard to protecting the local landscape and character but would allow for larger gardens and isolated properties and farm buildings on the edge of existing settlement boundaries to be included.

Option 6

In addition to areas of public open space and churchyards are there other open areas within settlement boundaries which should be specifically protected from the possibility of infill development?

12.11 In addition to fundamental options around whether settlement boundaries should be drawn tighter or looser it has become apparent since the current settlement boundaries were defined that there are a number of situations which a review of settlement boundaries should address. The review will need to look at new development which has been granted planning permission or built on the edge of but outside of existing settlement boundaries since 1998. Additionally there are circumstances where settlement boundaries cut through gardens or fields without any reference to a logical or identifiable feature on the ground. This has created uncertainties which the settlement boundary review process will need to address.

Option 7

Settlement boundaries should only be amended where the current boundary no longer reflects what is on the ground because new development has taken place and/or the boundary does not relate to a physical feature on the ground (i.e. a fence/hedge/ property).

Option 8

Despite changes on the ground settlement boundaries should stay as they are. This will provide consistency on where development will or will not be permitted.