

Approach to Rural Areas (outside the three tiers of the Sustainable Settlement Hierarchy)

Breckland is a diverse District, up to 20% of the population live outside the top three tiers of the settlement hierarchy (Key Settlements, the Market Towns and Local Service Centres), in the rural areas characterised by dispersed villages and hamlets. With regards specifically to rural areas the NPPF advises that authorities should be responsive to local circumstances and plan housing developments to reflect local needs in a sustainable manner.

Policy PD05 seeks to capture the need to direct growth to the most sustainable locations, support local services, balance residential needs and employment opportunities, and seeks to enhance the rural economy thereby helping to maintain the vitality of rural communities. In line with the locally distinctive approach to sustainable development, rather than seeking to restrict all development outside the sustainable settlement hierarchy and inside of the settlement boundaries of the existing rural settlements where there are limited opportunities, this policy seeks to present a sensitive approach to rural housing that is responsive to local circumstances, striking a balance with employment needs and the countryside.

Policy PD05A - Settlement Boundaries in Rural Areas

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The following settlement boundaries are defined on the policies maps:

Beeston, Beetley, Carbrooke, Caston, Gressenhall, Griston, Hockham, Lyng, Mundford, North Lopham, Rocklands, Saham Toney, Thompson, Weasenham, Shropham, Eccles Road (Quidenham), Clint Green and Yaxham

In accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, inside the settlement boundaries, the principle of new development is deemed to be acceptable.

Appropriate development will be allowed immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary where all of the following criteria are satisfied:

- It is minor development of an appropriate scale and design to the settlement of up to 5 dwellings;
- It would not lead to the number of dwellings in the settlement increasing by more than 5% from adoption of the plan. The settlement refers to the number of dwellings inside the defined settlement boundary.
- Development provides a significant community benefit;
- The design contributes to preserving and where possible enhancing the historic nature and connectivity of communities.
- The development avoids actual or perceived coalescence of settlements

Development for self build dwellings will be considered favourably subject to meeting the above criteria.

Reasoned Justification

In line with the Spatial Development Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy, the level of new development permitted in settlements defined in Policy PD05A will be restricted, consistent with the rural character of these villages and reflects the more limited service provision and infrastructure available.

Development which facilitates self-build dwellings will be considered favourably, subject to meeting the criteria set out within the policy.

Planning applications will be expected to be accompanied by a supporting statement. The supporting statement will be treated as any other planning application document and subject to publication.. The statement will seek to address the following key areas:

1. Justification that the proposal will provide a significant community benefit.

Applicants should demonstrate in their statement that there is clear evidence that development will provide a community benefit; by meeting an identified local need, delivering community aspirations or by virtue of local support for a scheme. This can be done in many ways and the scale of evidence necessary will generally depend on the size and scale of the proposal and its potential impacts. Where the developer can demonstrate that there is appropriate support by the parish council, this will be a material consideration in favour of the scheme.

Evidence could comprise:

- Demonstration of local support e.g.
 - the views of the parish council,
 - robust surveys of local opinion prepared independently.
- Demonstration of conformity with a policy/policies in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan or delivering a community aspiration identified in an adopted Neighbourhood Plan;
- Provision of a community facility, asset or financial contributions towards such facilities which meet an identified need established in documentation such as a Parish or Neighbourhood Plan
- Demonstration of local need e.g.
 - a local housing needs assessment
 - an employment needs assessment

Development proposals which fail to demonstrate a significant benefit to the local community will not be permitted.

2. Justification that the applicant can demonstrate to the Council that the proposal is of appropriate scale and design.

Proposals must be of a size, design and scale that seek to meet an identified need and respects the setting. Careful siting, massing, use of surrounding landscape features and screening are important as is the enhancement of existing local characteristics. The statement should demonstrate how the site is connected to the surrounding settlement. In areas of greater landscape visibility sensitive design and landscaping is particularly important. The Council's development management service will be able to provide further guidance and comment on emerging schemes.

Policy PD05B – Small villages and hamlets outside of settlement boundaries

PD05B - New Residential and Employment Opportunities in Smaller Villages and Hamlets outside of defined settlement boundaries

Development in smaller villages and hamlets outside of defined settlement boundaries will be limited apart from in exceptional circumstances, where all of the following criteria are satisfied:

- The development comprises of sensitive infilling and rounding off of a cluster of dwellings with access to an existing highway.
- It is minor development of an appropriate scale and design to the settlement of up to 3 units;
- It can be demonstrated that there is appropriate support by the parish council;
- The design contributes to enhancing the historic nature and connectivity of communities.
- The proposal does not harm or undermine a visually important gap that contributes to the character and distinctiveness of the rural scene;

Development for self build dwellings will be considered favourably subject to meeting the above criteria.

Farmsteads and sporadic small scale groups of dwellings are considered as lying in the open countryside and are not classed as small villages and hamlets. These and isolated locations in the countryside, are unlikely to be considered acceptable.

Reasoned Justification

Breckland is a large, rural district which contains a high number of small villages and hamlets with little or no service provision. For those areas with 2 or fewer of the services / facilities, settlement boundaries have been removed on the basis that this limits development in locations where it is unsustainable for additional growth. However, having regard to local distinctiveness, it must be recognised that in areas outside of the settlement hierarchy, i.e. the areas regarded as open countryside, there are living and working communities whose social and economic viability must be addressed.

Policy PD05B seeks to address the development needs of these communities whilst minimising the impact on the countryside by allowing small scale and appropriate development to meet local needs through criteria based policy. Development will be carefully managed in line with PD05B, in a manner which is more restrictive than for those named settlements with boundaries.

Planning applications will be expected to be accompanied by a supporting statement. The supporting statement will be treated as any other planning application document and subject to publication.. The statement will seek to address the following key areas:

1. Justification that the proposal as seen represents either infill or rounding off in the listed settlements.

Infill is defined as: building taking place on a vacant plot in an otherwise built-up street frontage.

To be considered infill, a development will generally have built development along the road on either side of the site and be similar to adjacent properties in terms of its visual impact, plot size, dwelling size, floor levels and scale;

Rounding off is defined as: the completion of an incomplete group of buildings on land which is already partially developed and in such a way which will either complete the local road pattern or define and complete the boundaries of the group. Such rounding off should not change or distort the character or tradition of the group or the settlement in any undesirable way.

To be considered as rounding off the statement must address:

- Whether the perimeter of the site is already built up;
- Whether development would represent an outward expansion of the settlement;
- The strength and durability of boundary features to the open countryside and;
- The relationship with the existing settlement in terms of size, scale and density and its impact on local views.

It is important to note that not all sites which satisfy the above definitions of infill and rounding off will be suitable for development. Other factors which may affect the impacts of new dwellings include highways and access, landscape, flood risk, biodiversity, impacts on the SPA and impact on built heritage such as listed buildings and these, and other material considerations remain as part of the assessment process