

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**  
**POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 1 – 18 SEPTEMBER 2007**

**REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS MANAGER - ENVIRONMENT**  
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**BRECKLAND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CORE STRATEGY**  
**ANALYSIS OF LOCAL SERVICE CENTRE VILLAGES**

**Summary:** This report provides an analysis of those larger villages in Breckland which have the potential to accommodate sustainable growth as part of the Core Strategy for the Breckland Local Development Framework (LDF). Revisions to National Planning Policy and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (Regional Plan) recognises that larger villages can have a role in providing employment, services and housing to meet local needs. Work to date on the Core Strategy has consistently proposed that there are a number of Local Service Centre villages in Breckland. This has drawn significant comment at the various stages of consultation. As Breckland works on preparing a final draft Core Strategy for the LDF it is important this locally determined element of the LDF is considered and a view given on what forms the basis of forthcoming LDF consultation.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 A key function of the Breckland Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy is to determine the broad location of new housing and employment necessary to meet the District's requirements. A sound Core Strategy will ensure that development is sustainable and is directed to locations that can support and deliver development within existing infrastructure and environmental capacity. It is important for a rural district such as Breckland that the sustainability of rural services is supported by appropriately located development while at the same time ensuring that the environment and landscape of the wider rural area is protected and issues around rural isolation, inaccessibility to services and reliance on the private car are not exacerbated.
- 1.2 Whilst the significant majority of new development will generally be directed to the market towns to maintain and enhance their function, changes to National and Regional planning policy now assist Local Planning Authorities who wish to support the service role of their larger villages. This is not without qualification and there are criteria to ensure that the focus remains on identifying the sustainable larger villages where there is already a good level of service provision.
- 1.3 Work to date on the Core Strategy has involved three rounds of public consultation following decisions of this authority. Drafts of the LDF Strategy have consistently proposed that there are a number of Local Service Centre villages in Breckland. This has always drawn significant and mixed comment at the various stages of consultation. The last round of consultation was undertaken in March-April 2007 and a key issue to which people responded was around the number and role of Local Service Centre villages in Breckland.
- 1.4 This Report seeks to appraise Members of the latest evidence around the proposed Local Service Centre villages in Breckland and the additional options that have been promoted and to seek a view on how Breckland proceeds with this strand of the Core Strategy.

## 2. KEY DECISION

2.1 This is not a key decision.

## 3. EQUALITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CRIME & DISORDER

3.1 This report raises no issues relating to Equalities, Human Rights and Crime and Disorder.

## 4. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

4.1 The matters raised in this report fall within the following Council priority:

- A well planned place to live which encourages vibrant communities

## 5. CONTEXT FOR LOCAL SERVICE CENTRES

5.1 For the past 20 years or more, the strategic planning framework has sought to strictly control development and only allow for strategic housing, employment and retail development in rural districts, such as Breckland, at the market towns. This position was embedded in existing Norfolk Structure Plan and Breckland Local Plan and in their preceding documents. Recent alterations in the last 3 years at the National and Regional strategic planning level have acknowledged that larger villages with a good level of services can accommodate further development, especially where it would support the sustainability of local services and meet local housing and employment needs. In a very rural district like Breckland it is important in addressing issues such as access to services and significant local housing need that the LDF Strategy considers the strategic role of those villages that genuinely function as immediate service centres for the surrounding rural areas.

5.2 Recently, National planning policy contained in PPS3 'Housing' (2006) refers to the need to maintain sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities in all areas, both urban and rural. Paragraph 38 of PPS3 requires Local Planning Authorities to take account of the need to provide housing in rural areas, including market towns, **local service centres** and smaller rural settlements. The emphasis in rural areas remains that new housing development must have good access to local services and to be of a sufficient size and mix to sustain and enhance community facilities, infrastructure and services. Local Service Centre villages present the best option to achieve this.

5.3 Additionally, National planning policy contained in PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' (2004) states that "away from larger urban areas planning authorities should focus most new development in or near to **local service centres** where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together". The PPS also states that such centres should be identified in local development documents as part of the LDF.

5.4 The concept of Local Service Centre villages is now set in Government Policy and regarded as a legitimate tier to accommodate development as part of the spatial strategy for an area. Further policy on Local Service Centres is provided in the Regional Spatial Strategy and a key test of soundness when the LDF is examined will be around conformity to National and Regional policy.

## **6. REGIONAL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (Regional Plan) published in December 2004 introduced at a strategic level the opportunity for Local Planning Authorities through their LDFs to consider whether some larger villages function as “Key Service Centres”. The rationale behind the designation of “Key Service Centres” is to maintain a level of services and employment to not only serve the village itself but also surrounding rural communities. The draft Regional Plan recognises that housing, particularly to meet local needs, is also considered important in supporting the sustainability of existing local services. At a local level, this Panel has previously agreed that Key Service Centres should be referred to as Local Service Centres in the Breckland context.
- 6.2 The Regional Plan has now been through its Public Examination and the Secretary of State has published her changes in December 2006 for consultation. Draft Policy SS4 of the revised Draft Regional Plan states: *“They (Local Development Documents) should also consider the potential of other key service centres to accommodate development which is sympathetic to the local character and of an appropriate scale and nature in relation to local housing and employment needs.”*
- 6.3 The proposed changes to the Regional Plan at paragraph 3.18 go on to provide a number of criteria which define Key Service Centre villages. Essentially they are large villages with a good level of services, which might include the following:
- (1) A primary school within the settlement and a secondary school within the settlement or easily accessible by public transport;
  - (2) Primary health care facilities;
  - (3) A range of retail and service provision capable of meeting day-to-day needs, in particular convenience shopping;
  - (4) Local employment opportunities; and
  - (5) Frequent public transport to higher order settlements
- 6.4 These criteria for Key Service Centres are very similar to the criteria previously published in the Draft Regional Plan in 2004. This provides for consistency of assessment in the background work and analysis behind the Breckland Local Development Framework. A full copy of the Regional Plan text and draft Policy SS4 is provided at Appendix A.
- 6.5 Satisfying the Regional Criteria listed above is the starting point in assessing which larger villages should be identified as Local Service Centre villages. Additional factors which should be taken into account in determining the number and policy response to Local Service Centres are:
- (1) Community views (including Parish Plans/Appraisals)
  - (2) Environmental factors (such as Biodiversity, landscape, flood risk)
  - (3) Infrastructure capacity; and
  - (4) Existing levels of committed development.

## **7. ANALYSIS OF CANDIDATE LOCAL SERVICE CENTRE VILLAGES**

- 7.1 A detailed analysis of how candidate Local Service Centre villages perform against the Regional Plan criteria and the additional local criteria listed above is provided at Appendix B. The list of candidate villages has been developed over the past 3 ½

years including various considerations by this Panel and its predecessor, the Council's Policy Task and Finish Group.

- 7.2 The first paper concerned with selection and definition of local service centre villages was produced in 2004 and reported to the then Policy Task and Finish Group. The paper sought to identify villages that had a shop a post office, some form of community facility such as a village hall, a range of employment opportunities, a primary school and a reasonable level of public transport (they met the preferred level of service for settlements of 1000 population as defined in the Norfolk County Council Norfolk Bus Strategy). These criteria were based on the then draft East of England Plan policy SS9.
- 7.3 This first paper, attached at Appendix E, included a pre-selection stage that sought to rigorously select the number of villages that were put forward as Local Service Centre villages. This stage set a population threshold of 1000 people which limited the number of Breckland villages to 20. In addition to these villages it was decided to include Litcham. Although Litcham does not have a population of 1000, it has a number of services as is a key village in the North West of the district, in an area which would otherwise have been considered to be under represented.
- 7.4 The results of this initial paper were that 12 villages either meet or come very close to meeting the five Regional Plan criteria and were therefore candidates for designation. The 12 villages were then included in the draft Strategy and Core Policies at the initial Preferred Options Stage in October 2005 in a report agreed by this Panel at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2005.
- 7.5 The initial Preferred Options stage and associated consultation included discussions with a number of the villages identified as Local Service Centres. A full list of consultation meetings attended by the LDF team is provided at Appendix C. It was evident from much of the discussions that a number of the villages were concerned about this status and were not convinced that it was the best option for their village. The main problem at this time was that the policy was not sufficiently detailed enough to give people a clear view of what this designation would mean for a village. The Preferred Options had concentrated on housing growth but did not include any specification as to how many houses would be built.
- 7.6 As a response to the consultation results from the 2005 Preferred Options consultation and from discussions with Parish Councils it became clear that some communities wanted to have 'Local Service Centres' status but without the growth. The consequence of this option would be that the LDF could give extra weight to the protection and promotion of service provision in these communities without further growth or development. Table 1 below lists those Parish Councils who want to be considered as Local Service Centres for service provision only.

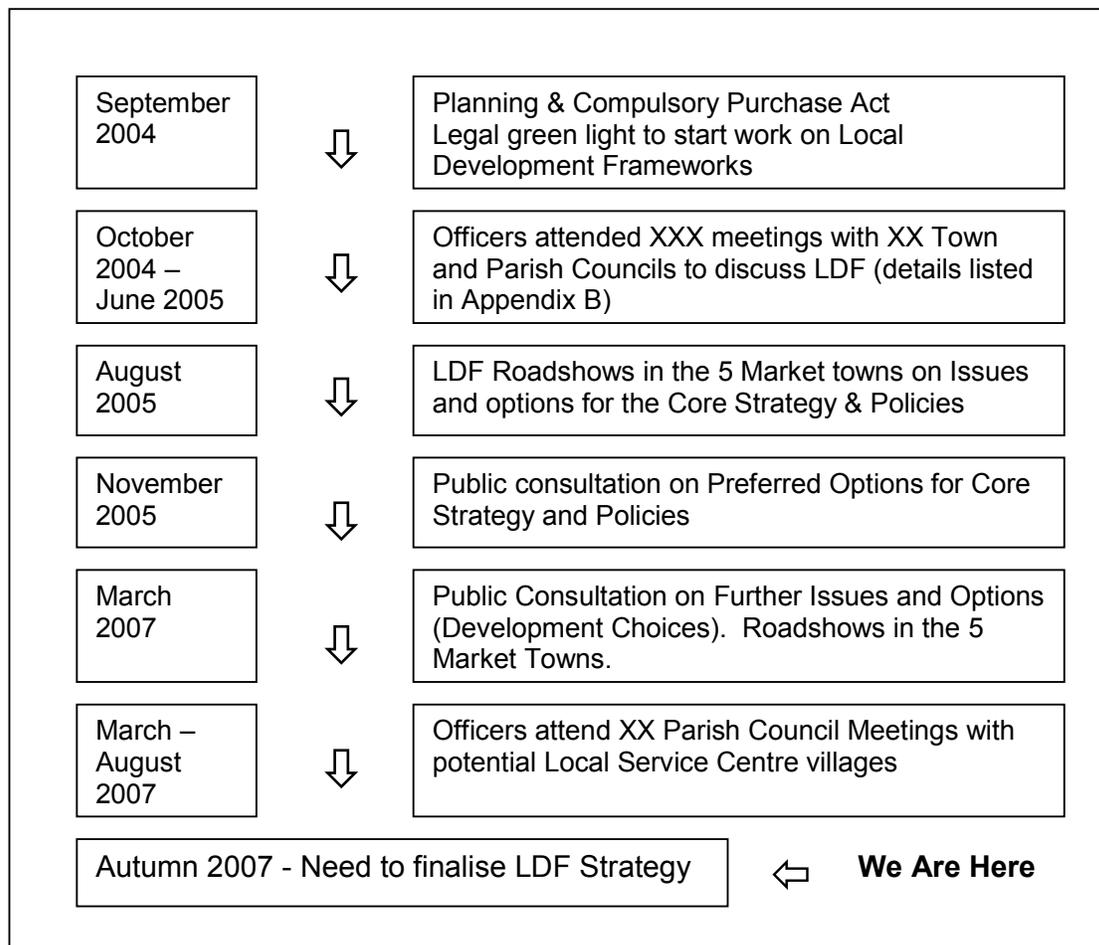
Table 1: Candidate Service Centre Villages that do not want growth

Village	Reason(s)
Mattishall	Village has grown over recent years and has reached a level where the village can support its services Concerns over local infrastructure
Necton	Village has grown over recent years Planning permission remains for 143 houses Poor access onto A47
North Elmham	Does not want to be a Local Service Centre Village Environmental issues – landscape
Swanton Morley	Village has grown and there remains the scope for further development within existing boundaries

Village	Reason(s)
Swanton Morley Contd.	Uncertainty over the future of military barracks during the LDF Period – this could represent a significant redevelopment opportunity

7.7 The option of a two tier Local Service Centre approach, identifying those villages for growth and those for service provision only was taken forward in the further Issues and Options document “Development Choices”. There remains a reasonable option of looking at different policy responses to the overall function of Local Service Centre villages. This Panel considered the ‘Development Choices’ LDF consultation document at its meeting on 13th March 2007 and agreed its content for public consultation. Since that meeting the consultation has been undertaken and additional evidence has been gathered from infrastructure providers, Parish Councils and local residents.

**Figure 1: Process to date**



7.8 Figure 1 above summarises the process to date in selecting the candidate Local Service Centre. Appendix C of this report lists the various meetings which have informed the preparation of this part of the strategy and there is a further summary in Appendix B of consultation results. In addition to public consultation on the LDF this Panel has had the opportunity to hear from and scrutinise a number of key service providers including the Education Authority (18<sup>th</sup> October 2006), Primary Care Trust

(13<sup>th</sup> March 2007), Anglian Water and Environment Agency (28<sup>th</sup> November 2006) and various transport agencies. In addition to these Panel meetings your Officers also attend regular meetings with the above agencies to establish infrastructure capacity in Breckland and strategy responses.

## **8. POLICY RESPONSES TO LOCAL SERVICE CENTRE VILLAGES**

- 8.1 To date there has been a number of consultations around the emerging Breckland LDF and potential Local Service Centre villages (see Appendix B). These consultations have always elicited a considerable response including the last Development Choices consultation in Spring 2007. In preparing the LDF there is support for a two-tier system of Local Service Centre villages. Other options include deleting villages from the list or adding further villages. To introduce additional villages the Authority would need to be satisfied that they represent a sustainable option in terms of meeting the Regional Plan criteria and local environmental factors (see Appendix D). Introducing additional villages at this stage will need to be robustly evidenced as they have not formed part of the earlier 3 rounds of consultation on the LDF.
- 8.2 In taking forward the issue of Local Service Centre villages there are four options available as follows
- (1) Delete a village from the list.
  - (2) Identify a Village as a Local Service Centre for Service Provision
  - (3) Identify a Village as a Local Service Centre for development
  - (4) Introduce additional villages as candidate Local Service Centres

## **9. OPTIONS AVAILABLE**

- 9.1 Members are requested to provide a view on the number and strategy for proposed Local Service Centre Villages based on the evidence in this Report and that this view provides the basis for further work in finalising the Breckland Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Document for consultation later this year.
- 9.2.1 Members do not provide a view at this stage on Local Service Centre villages and consider the issue as part of wider discussions on the entire Breckland Core Strategy and Development Control Policies Document at a future Panel meeting.

## **10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 10.1 To enable progress on finalising a Strategy for the Breckland LDF for consultation later this year, Members views on this issue are requested. This will enable your Officers to gather additional evidence if necessary and ensure that the latest views of Members and the community are considered in developing this important element of the LDF Core Strategy for consultation.

### **RECOMMENDATION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1**

- 10.2 Members views are requested on the number of, and policy response to, Local Service Centre villages in Breckland as the basis for further consultation on the LDF later in 2007.

*This report has taken account of the need for compliance with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and the requirements of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998. This report raises no matters to which attention specifically needs to be drawn under the legislation.*

Appendix A – Policy SS4 and supporting text from Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy (2006)  
Appendix B – Analysis of candidate Local Service Centre villages  
Appendix C – Record of Parish and Public Meetings attended by LDF Team  
Appendix D – Analysis of additional Local Service Centre Villages  
Appendix E – Original long list of potential Local Service Centre Villages, considered by Policy Task & Finish Group 2004.