



Fenland Settlement Hierarchy

January 2013

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FENLAND SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY STUDY

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A settlement hierarchy ranks settlements according to their size and their range of services and facilities. When coupled with an understanding of the possible capacity for growth, this enables decisions to be taken about the most appropriate planning strategy for each settlement.
- 1.2 One of the primary aims of establishing a settlement hierarchy is to promote sustainable communities by bringing housing, jobs and services closer together in an attempt to maintain and promote the viability of local facilities and reduce the need to travel to services and facilities elsewhere. A settlement hierarchy policy can help to achieve this by concentrating housing growth in those settlements that already have a range of services (as long as there is capacity for growth), and restricting it in those that do not.
- 1.3 In general terms, larger settlements that have a higher population and more services and facilities are more sustainable locations for further growth. However, this may not always be the case. A larger settlement may, for example, have physical constraints that cannot be overcome and therefore restrict the scope for further development. Conversely, a smaller settlement may be well located and with few constraints, and suitable for new development on a scale that might be accompanied by the provision of new services and facilities.
- 1.4 The purpose of this study is to identify and recommend a possible settlement hierarchy for Fenland, based primarily on an analysis of population, services and facilities in the District's settlements. It is important to note that the study itself cannot establish a settlement hierarchy as a policy tool. That is a matter for a statutory planning document – specifically, the Fenland Core Strategy Development Plan Document.
- 1.5 Therefore, this study presents the analysis and evidence, with recommendations, to underpin the settlement hierarchy which is to be included in a policy of the Core Strategy.
- 1.6 It should be noted at this point that the Fenland Neighbourhood Planning Vision work of 2010-2011, undertaken by consultants, made an innovative, but unconventional, recommendation to Fenland Council with respect to a proposed settlement hierarchy based on groups of settlements rather than determining all settlements individually into a hierarchy. Whilst Fenland Council found this approach interesting, it was decided not appropriate and would not fit its emerging Core Strategy. As such, a more traditional settlement hierarchy proposal has been taken forward in this report.

2.0 Policy Context

- 2.1 Decisions about a possible settlement hierarchy for Fenland must take into account the policy context set at the national and regional levels. The Government has now replaced all national Planning Policy Statements with a single National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2012).
- 2.2 The most relevant aspects of the NPPF on settlement strategy matters includes:
 - The Core Principle that planning should actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable (para 17)

- To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities (para 55)
 - Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances (examples given in NPPF) (para 55)
- 2.3 On 3 January 2013 the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was revoked by Statutory Instrument. There is no longer any requirement for the Fenland Core Strategy to ensure consistency with that Plan, but it was still in place during the formative stages of the Core Strategy. It contained some valuable advice about identifying a hierarchy of settlements. Policy SS4 required Local Development Documents to define the approach to development in towns other than 'Key Centres for Development and Change' and in rural areas – and such towns were to include market towns. It also said that consideration should be given to the potential of other key service centres to accommodate development which is sympathetic to local character and of an appropriate scale and nature in relation to local housing and employment needs.
- 2.4 The explanatory text accompanying policy SS4 (para 3.17) explained that key service centres are large villages with a good level of service, which might include:
- A primary school within the settlement and a secondary school within the settlement or easily accessible by public transport
 - Primary health care facilities
 - A range of retail and service provision capable of meeting day-to-day needs, particularly for convenience shopping
 - Local employment opportunities
 - Frequent public transport to higher order settlements.
- 2.5 From the context described above, it is clear that the Fenland Core Strategy will need to present a settlement hierarchy which should form the basis for the distribution of growth (in particular, housing growth, but also employment growth and the development of services and facilities). Given the absence of any cities or major towns in Fenland, the highest level in that hierarchy will need to be 'market towns'. There will need to be different categories of settlement beneath the market town level, starting with settlements that perform the function of 'key service centres' (although there is no requirement to use that particular name). The categories of settlement below market town level are a matter for local decision. The presence or absence of facilities and services such as those listed in para 2.4 above should form the basis for decisions about which settlement should fall within which category of the hierarchy, but there is no absolute requirement to use all or only these particular facilities and services as selection criteria.

3.0 Methodology

- 3.1 In the light of all the above, the process for identifying a settlement hierarchy for Fenland is as follows:
1. Identify and decide the categories of settlement within the hierarchy
 2. Identify the settlements in Fenland (by excluding groupings of properties that cannot be regarded as constituting a "settlement")
 3. Identify the criteria to be used in allocating each settlement into one of the categories
 4. Apply the criteria to each settlement using published data and on-site survey work
 5. Apply any policy and 'localism' aspirations
 6. Record the results and make recommendations for the Fenland Core Strategy

4.0 The Settlement Categories

- 4.1 Given the absence of any cities or large towns in Fenland, the first level in the hierarchy should be 'Market Towns'. Settlements below this level will all be villages of one form or another.
- 4.2 As the basic vision for Fenland is one of sustainable growth, it is recommended that the largest villages providing a key service centre function for the surrounding area should fall into a category of settlement described as 'Growth Village'.
- 4.3 The national context allows the Council to reach its own conclusions about the number and nature of settlement categories for other villages below the 'Growth Village' level of the hierarchy. The Appendix contains details of all the places in Fenland that might warrant consideration as villages, and it is clear that there is a considerable range in the size of villages and the services and facilities that they possess. This suggests that a single tier beneath Growth Village would be inappropriate. It is therefore proposed that there should be a category of 'Limited Growth Village' for villages which contain some services and facilities, but not enough for the village to qualify for inclusion as a Growth Village.
- 4.4 Small villages with very few services and facilities should fall into the next category of the hierarchy, 'Small Village'.
- 4.5 Smaller groupings of dwellings that might reasonably be regarded as constituting a village, but with few, if any, services and facilities could be classified as an 'Other Village'. Any other collection of dwellings that do not fall within any of the five categories should be regarded as being part of the 'countryside'.
- 4.6 Therefore, in summary, it is proposed that there should be five levels to the Fenland settlement hierarchy, as follows:

Settlement Category	Description
Market Towns	Towns of significant size, with the greatest range of services and facilities in the District, and, in principle, the most sustainable locations for major growth
Growth Villages	Large villages which act as key service centres for the surrounding rural area by virtue of the range of services and facilities they possess, and, in principle, suitable for growth
Limited Growth Villages	Villages which benefit from a modest range of services and facilities, and, in principle, suitable for growth on a scale which is less than that for Growth Villages
Small Villages	Small villages with few, if any, services and facilities, suitable only for development of relatively few dwellings
Other Villages	Groupings of dwellings that might reasonably be regarded as constituting a village, but with few, if any, services and facilities

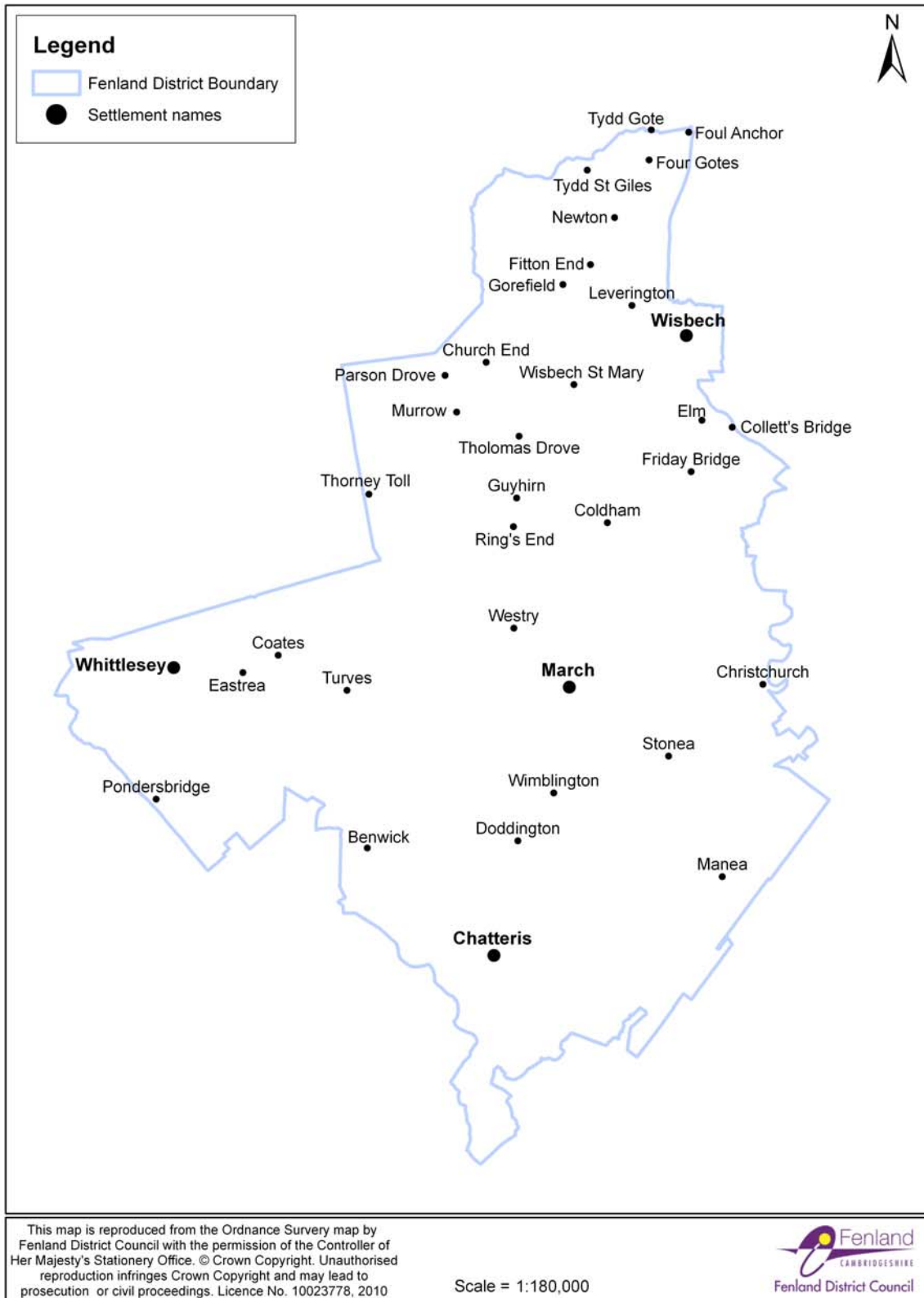
5.0 The Fenland Settlements

- 5.1 There are four settlements in Fenland that stand well apart from all of the others – Wisbech (with an estimated 2011 population of 23,450), March (20,990), Whittlesey (13,010) and Chatteris (9,960). These are the largest settlements in terms of population, and as can be seen from the population figures presented in the Appendix, the smallest (Chatteris) is significantly larger than the next largest settlement, Doddington, whose population is only 2,210.
- 5.2 Wisbech, March, Whittlesey and Chatteris are the only settlements with secondary schools. They each have a wide range of services and facilities, including retail, employment opportunities, health and community facilities and public transport. They are widely acknowledged by residents as market towns and have been categorised as such in previous statutory plans (structure plans and the Fenland Local Plan). **They clearly function as market towns and it is recommended that they should continue to be classified as such.**
- 5.3 No other settlement in the District has the range of services and facilities to qualify as a market town. Therefore, the remainder of this study will focus largely on places other than these four towns.
- 5.4 The places considered within this study are listed below:

1	Benwick	17	Manea
2	Christchurch	18	Murrow
3	Church End	19	Newton
4	Coates	20	Parson Drove
5	Coldham	21	Pondersbridge
6	Collett's Bridge	22	Ring's End
7	Doddington	23	Stonea
8	Eastrea	24	Tholomas Drove
9	Elm	25	Thorney Toll
10	Fitton End	26	Turves
11	Foul Anchor	27	Tydd Gote
12	Four Gotes	28	Tydd St. Giles
13	Friday Bridge	29	Westry
14	Gorefield	30	Wimblington
15	Guyhirn	31	Wisbech St. Mary
16	Leverington		

- 5.5 Excluded from consideration are very small groupings of dwellings and scattered ribbons of houses along roadsides, which cannot be regarded as constituting a village or settlement – places such as Euximoor Drove, Tips End and Ramsey Mereside (which is largely in Huntingdonshire).
- 5.6 The map on page 5 shows the location of each of the places in the above table.

Fenland District Settlements



- 5.7 The Appendix presents a summary (as at the time of survey in 2012) of the population, services and facilities for each of the 31 places in the table. It can be seen that Fitton End, Four Gotes, Stonea and Westry are particularly small (with a population under 200) with few, if any, facilities and services. Thorney Toll is also particularly small; it appears to possess shops and restaurants but these are largely directed to motorists on the A47 Trunk Road, and the settlement consists of ribbon development either side of that road. In summary, all these five places are groupings of dwellings, sometimes scattered along roadsides, rather than being what a reasonable outside person would describe as a village as such, and certainly could not be regarded as sustainable locations for any growth. It is therefore considered that they should be excluded from the settlement hierarchy altogether.
- 5.8 As a result, it is the task of this study to examine the position of each of the following remaining settlements in a settlement hierarchy for Fenland: Benwick, Christchurch, Church End, Coates, Coldham, Collett's Bridge, Doddington, Eastrea, Elm, Foul Anchor, Friday Bridge, Gorefield, Guyhirn, Leverington, Manea, Murrow, Newton, Parson Drove, Pondersbridge, Ring's End, Tholomas Drove, Turves, Tydd Gote, Tydd St Giles, Wimblington and Wisbech St Mary.

6.0 The Criteria

- 6.1 The purpose of this section of the study is to identify and present the criteria to be used in assigning each settlement into a category within the hierarchy. Taking into account the matters identified in paragraph 2.4 above, it is clear that criteria should relate to size, services and facilities, opportunities for employment and accessibility.
- 6.2 The starting point for any analysis is the size of the settlement, as expressed by its population. Therefore the first criterion is the most up-to-date population estimate for the settlement, i.e. the 2011 mid-year estimate. It is emphasised that a settlement hierarchy is about settlements, not parishes. There are instances where a settlement (village) extends across a parish boundary and therefore includes properties in more than one parish. There are some parishes in Fenland with more than one village. Every effort has been made to identify the estimated population for the village itself, rather than the parish, wherever possible. Population data has been sourced from the Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group.
- 6.3 For facilities and services, the selection criteria are the presence of a post office facility (not necessarily a separate post office), a convenience shop, public house or social club, library/mobile library, place of worship, village/church hall, doctor's surgery and primary school.
- 6.4 If there is a facility such as a shop, school or doctor's surgery in a village, there will be some employment, but it is important to consider additional employment opportunities as a separate criterion, as the presence of employment offers the potential for more sustainable patterns of development. The presence of a modest source of employment or a more significant source of employment in or within easy walking distance of the village are the relevant criteria.
- 6.5 For accessibility, the criteria to be used relate to access to secondary schooling, bus frequency and the presence of a railway station.
- 6.6 As there are no villages with a secondary school, villages have been rated according to distance, with a score of 1 where the nearest secondary school is within 5 road miles; and a score of 0 where the nearest secondary school is more than 5 road miles away.
- 6.7 For bus frequency, villages have been awarded a rating score in accordance with the following table:

Score	Frequency
5	Hourly or more 0900-2100, starts before 0800, finishes after 2100
4	Hourly or more 0900-2100, starts before 0800
3	Hourly or more 0900-2100
2	Daily service - less than hourly between 0900-2100
1	Weekly service
0	No bus service

However, the routes and frequency of bus services can change at any point in time and there is no guarantee that a rating that exists at one point in time will always be the case. For this reason, the current ratings should be treated only as a guide to accessibility, and they should not be used as an absolute criterion.

- 6.8 There is only one village with a railway station (Manea), but this is considered to be a relevant issue that could have a bearing on the issue of accessibility by public transport, if the application of other criteria put Manea's position in the hierarchy in doubt. This is particularly so as trains only stop once a day in each direction at Manea, though it should be noted that the Council is working hard with operators to increase the number of stops.
- 6.9 Consideration has been given to other criteria that might be a measure of a village's possible position in a hierarchy – for example, the presence of a garage/petrol filling station, the availability of dial-a-ride transport, and the presence and quality of open spaces and play spaces. However, these are considered to be of less significance than the criteria identified above and could unduly influence the outcome if given weight.
- 6.10 Having established the basic criteria, it is now necessary to determine which ones are required to be met in order for a village to be assigned into the most appropriate category in the hierarchy.
- 6.11 **Growth Village:** A growth village needs to be one of the larger villages, with the recommendation that it should have a population in the top 20% of Fenland's villages. This means it is required to have a population of 1,500 or more. As it must act as a service centre for its rural hinterland, it must possess all of the basic facilities and services, with at least some (small) range of shops. Therefore, it should have a daily post office facility, at least one convenience shop and some other shop or takeaway/restaurant, a primary school, a doctor's surgery and some employment base. These are the minimum requirements which should be expected for a village to be placed into this category, and if there are additional services and facilities, they will all help to improve its sustainability credentials.
- 6.12 **Limited Growth Village:** A limited growth village cannot be small in population terms, and could reasonably be expected to have at least 1,000 residents. Since it must have a basic range of facilities and services, it is suggested that the additional qualifying criteria should be the presence of a daily post office facility, at least one convenience shop, a primary school and some source of local employment.
- 6.13 **Small Village:** A small village will be one that fails to meet the qualifying criteria for either of the above categories. It may possess some facilities or benefit from a service (including for example, public transport), but the absence of a range of the most important facilities will render it the least sustainable type of settlement to accept development on any significant scale.
- 6.14 **Other Village:** An other village will also be one that fails to meet the qualifying criteria for a Growth or Limited Growth Village. It can be distinguished from a Small Village by virtue of its size, with a population no greater than 200.

- 6.15 In concluding this section, it is worth emphasising that the criteria are based around the characteristics and assets of a village. They do not take into account any constraints to development. It does not necessarily follow that the amount of new development which could or should be accommodated in and around a village will correspond precisely to its position in the hierarchy, as levels of development are likely to be determined by a number of other factors such as the overall strategic policy and direction of growth, developer interest, the availability of sites and the presence of constraints to development.

7.0 Applying the Criteria

- 7.1 Information for each of the criteria was gathered by visiting each settlement. Additional information was taken from Cambridgeshire County Council's Research Group population estimate statistics (mid 2011), from the County Council's education pages, and from NHS online.
- 7.2 The table in the Appendix presents a summary of the information collected against each of the potential places identified at paragraph 5.4 above.
- 7.3 As explained in paragraph 5.7, there are a number of places which are really scattered groupings of dwellings, often no more than a ribbon of development along a roadside. They cannot reasonably be regarded as constituting a village and so fall out of the classification process. As a result, the villages to be considered in this section are those listed in paragraph 5.8.
- 7.4 **Growth Villages:** From the Appendix, it can be seen that there are only three villages which automatically qualify as Growth Villages, when assessed against the criteria identified in paragraph 6.11. These are Doddington, Manea and Wimblington. Each one has a population well in excess of 1,500, together with all the facilities and services necessary for a Growth Village. In addition, all of these villages have some form of employment base.
- 7.5 In addition to the facilities required for Growth Village status, Manea is the only village in Fenland with a railway station (albeit a very limited service at present). Doddington has a community hospital providing both outpatient treatment and diagnostic services. Wimblington and Doddington have reasonable access to a secondary school, and although the secondary school rating for Manea is not so good, this is not considered a sufficient reason to exclude it from the Growth Village classification. These three villages are all served by buses on a daily basis (Monday to Saturday), although current frequency levels are mixed.
- 7.6 There are other villages with a population in excess of 1,500 (Elm, Leverington and Wisbech St Mary), but none has a doctor's surgery. Therefore, under a strict application of the criteria, they do not automatically qualify for the Growth Village category.
- 7.7 **Limited Growth Villages:** From the Appendix, it can be seen that six villages meet the criteria for Limited Growth Village classification: Coates, Elm, Friday Bridge, Leverington, Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary. Each one has a population in excess of 1,000, together with the facilities and services identified in paragraph 6.12. In addition, Parson Drove benefits from a doctor's surgery (albeit located within Church End). Elm and Wisbech St Mary have some significant local employment. All of these villages have at least one public house/social club, place of worship and village/church hall, together with access to the mobile library service.
- 7.8 Benwick is the only other village with a population exceeding 1,000 but it has no shop or permanent post office and so is not recommended to qualify as a Limited Growth Village.
- 7.9 **Small Villages:** The villages that qualify as Small Villages are Benwick, Christchurch, Eastrea, Gorefield, Guyhirn, Murrow, Newton, Turves and Tydd St Giles.

- 7.10 **Other Villages:** Taking into account those places that cannot be regarded as constituting a settlement (as discussed in paragraph 5.7), the villages that qualify as Other Villages are Church End, Coldham, Collett's Bridge, Foul Anchor, Pondersbridge, Ring's End, Tholomas Drove and Tydd Gote.

8.0 Policy and 'Localism' Aspirations

- 8.1 The recommendations of Section 7 are based on a factual assessment of settlements against a range of criteria.
- 8.2 However, it is entirely reasonable for a Council to adjust the above recommendations if, as a matter of policy or strategy, the Council wants to actually promote more development in certain villages, by moving them higher up in the hierarchy.
- 8.3 In this regard, attention is drawn to the Growth Villages category. On the basis that (a) Fenland Council has a pro-sustainable growth approach to its Core Strategy and (b) the fact that the three recommended Growth Villages identified in Section 7 are all towards the south of the District, it appears legitimate to consider whether any currently identified Limited Growth Village should be promoted up the hierarchy. Paragraph 7.6 already identifies three possible candidates, namely Elm, Leverington and Wisbech St Mary.
- 8.4 A case could be made for each of these locations to be upgraded to the Growth Village category, as they are all located towards the north of the District. However, under the spirit of 'localism' it is recommended that only Wisbech St Mary be upgraded because the Wisbech St Mary Parish Council expressly asked for its village to be upgraded as part of the July-Sept 2011 consultation exercise on the Core Strategy. In addition, there are local employment opportunities. The village fails to qualify as a Growth Village on a strict application of the criteria only because of the absence of a doctor's surgery, but surgeries exist in nearby Wisbech.
- 8.5 The two other villages are recommended to be retained as Limited Growth Villages.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 Taking all of the above into account, the conclusions of this Study are as follows:
- There should be a settlement hierarchy for Fenland which comprises Market Towns, Growth Villages, Limited Growth Villages, Small Villages and Other Villages.
 - Places which consist of a very small number of dwellings, with few, if any facilities, often no more than a ribbon of development along a roadside, should be excluded from the hierarchy.
 - The Market Towns should be Wisbech, March, Whittlesey and Chatteris.
 - The Growth Villages should be Doddington, Manea, Wimblington and Wisbech St Mary.
 - The Limited Growth Villages should be Coates, Elm, Friday Bridge, Leverington, and Parson Drove.
 - The Small Villages should be Benwick, Christchurch, Eastrea, Gorefield, Guyhirn, Murrow, Newton, Turves and Tydd St Giles.
 - The Other Villages should be Church End, Coldham, Collett's Bridge, Foul Anchor, Pondersbridge, Ring's End, Tholomas Drove and Tydd Gote.

APPENDIX: SERVICES AND FACILITIES IN FENLAND VILLAGES

	Settlement	Population	Post Office Facility	Convenience Shop	Other Shop	Takeaway/ Restaurant	Public House/ Social Club	Mobile Library	Place of Worship	Village/ Church Hall	Doctor's	Primary School	Employment	Access to Secondary School	Bus Frequency	Railway Station
1	Benwick	1,070	0	0	0	0	1	Y	0	1	0	1	Y	0	2	
2	Christchurch	630	0*	1	0	0	1	Y	1	1	0	1	Y	0	1	
3	Church End	160	0	0	1	0	1		1	0	1**	0		0	2	
4	Coates	1,180	1	1	1	1	2	Y	2	1	0	1	Y	1	3	
5	Coldham	180	0	0	0	0	0	Y	0	0	0	0		1	3	
6	Collett's Bridge	110	0	0	1	0	0		0	0	0	0	YY	1	0	
7	Doddington	2,210	1	3	5	1	2	Y	2	3	1	1	YY	1	3	
8	Eastrea	830	0	0	0	0	1		0	0	0	0	Y	1	3	
9	Elm	1,750	1	1	1	0	2	Y	1	1	0	1	YY	1	3	
10	Fitton End	70	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0		1	2	
11	Foul Anchor	80	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0		0	0	
12	Four Gotes	80	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0		0	0	
13	Friday Bridge	1,450	1	1	0	1	1	Y	1	1	0	1	Y	1	3	
14	Gorefield	890	1	1	1	0	1	Y	2	1	0	1	Y	1	2	
15	Guyhirn	740	0	1	0	0	1	Y	1	1	0	1	Y	0	5	
16	Leverington	1,940	1	1	0	1	3	Y	1	1	0	1	Y	1	2	
17	Manea	2,070	1	1	3	4	2	Y	2	2	1	1	Y	0	2	Y
18	Murrow	950	0	1	0	0	1	Y	1	1	0	1		0	0	
19	Newton	480	1	1	0	0	1	Y	1	1	0	0		0	2	
20	Parson Drove	1,040	1	1	2	0	2	Y	2	1	1**	1	Y	0	1	
21	Pondersbridge	120	0	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	0	Y	1	2	
22	Ring's End	90	0	0	0	1	0	Y	1	0	0	0		0	3	
23	Stonea	80	0	0	0	0	1		0	0	0	0		0	0	
24	Tholomas Drove	110	0	0	0	0	1		0	0	0	0		0	3	
25	Thorney Toll	80	0	2	0	2	0		0	1	0	0	Y	0	5	
26	Turves	370	0	0	0	0	1	Y	0	0	0	0		1	0	
27	Tydd Gote	80	1	1	0	0	1		1	0	0	0	Y	0	2	
28	Tydd St. Giles	780	0*	0	1	0	1	Y	2	1	0	1	Y	0	2	
29	Westry	170	0	0	0	0	0		1	1	0	0	YY	1	3	
30	Wimblington	1,880	1	2	2	0	2	Y	2	1	1	1	YY	1	2	
31	Wisbech St. Mary	1,590	1	2	0	1	2	Y	2	1	0	1	YY	1	3	

NOTES:

- Population figures are 2011 mid-year estimates. (Source: Cambridgeshire County Council - Cambridgeshire Population and Dwelling Stock Estimates 2011 (Interim), November 2012. The population figure for Church End is estimated by Fenland District Council.
- Most post offices in Fenland villages are combined with a convenience shop. So, for example, where a village is noted to have one of each, this often means that there is one store which includes convenience shopping and post office facilities.
- Where the symbol * appears in the 'Post Office Facility' column, there is no permanent post office, but some post office services are available on a part-time basis (Christchurch – mobile post office; Tydd St Giles - in the community centre)
- No village has a permanent library, but the 'mobile library' column indicates whether the village is visited on the regular route of the mobile library service
- The Parson Drove Doctor's Surgery is actually located in Church End. Each settlement is shown as possessing a doctor's surgery, but the ** symbol indicates that this is the same premises.
- In the 'Employment' column a 'Y' means that the village has some modest source of local employment. A 'YY' means that the village has some more significant source of local employment.
- For 'Access to Secondary School Rating', a score of 1 is awarded where the nearest secondary school is within 5 road miles; and a score of 0 where the nearest secondary school is more than 5 road miles away. Many of the villages on the west side of Wisbech lie within 5 road miles of Wisbech Grammar School, but this is not reflected in the table as places at the school are not available to all children.
- The method for awarding scores in the 'Bus Frequency' column appears in paragraph 6.7
- In the 'Mobile Library' and 'Railway Station' columns, Y means "yes"