



**FDC/Matter 2**

**FENLAND LOCAL PLAN CORE STRATEGY  
DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT**

**EXAMINATION**

**FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL STATEMENT**

**MATTER 2: OVERARCHING STRATEGY & TARGETS**

**Fenland District Council**  
Fenland Hall  
County Road  
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PE15 8NQ

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[www.fenland.gov.uk](http://www.fenland.gov.uk)

## **Fenland District Council Statement in response to Matter 2: Overarching Strategy & Targets**

### **ISSUES and QUESTIONS**

**Q1. Since the publication of the Proposed Submission Core Strategy (February 2013) and the amendments as set out in the Core Strategy Proposed Submission Addendum (June 2013) the ‘Objectively Assessed Need for Additional Housing – Memorandum of Co-operation between the local authorities in the Cambridge Housing Market Area (September 2013)’ (CD016) has been published. This explains that the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) forecasts a need for an additional 93,000 homes in the Cambridgeshire Sub Region of which 12,000 are identified in Fenland. The authorities that are party to the memorandum acknowledge that Peterborough has already accommodated a proportion of the housing need arising in the Cambridge HMA which could reasonably be assumed to amount to approximately 2500 homes as the respective SHMAs overlap. The various authorities, including Peterborough City Council, have therefore agreed that taking account of the 2500 dwelling element of the Cambridge SHMA already being met in Peterborough’s adopted Local Plan, this leaves 90,500 dwellings to be provided in the Cambridge HMA to ensure that the full objectively assessed need for housing in the Cambridge HMA will be met in forthcoming Local Plan reviews. Of this requirement, it is agreed that 11,000 dwellings are to be provided in Fenland.**

**The Fenland Housing Evidence Report (CD025) refers to the 2008 ONS trend based population projections (as does the Fenland Neighbourhood Planning Vision document) whereas the SHMA (May 2013) includes assessment against the 2011 Census.**

**In light of the above, is the Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy Submission Version (September 2013) based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence to assess and meet the objectively assessed housing needs of the area?**

*[Note: FDC has spotted a slight factual error in the context set out above. CD016 (‘Memorandum of Cooperation’) was published in May 2013 not Sept 2013 as noted above]*

In short, yes it is.

FDC is very confident that its evidence base is both comprehensive and up to date to support the identified need for housing in the area and, subsequently, the enabling (in the plan) for new housing in the area. Core Document CD025 (‘Housing Evidence Report’) has a detailed explanation as to how the housing target in the plan has been derived.

What is particularly striking in the evidence is the fact that the housing target for Fenland has, over the 3 years of preparing the plan, hardly waived from a target of around 11,000 new homes, despite the fact that national and regional guidance and policy has been in a constant period of flux in this period. In short, the 11,000 target seems ‘about right’, whichever way you look at the evidence and over whichever timeframe or latest projections you use (and remembering that forecasting and assessing objectively assessed need is far from an exact science). This consistency gives great confidence that both our evidence base and our target is fit for purpose and should be supported. Indeed, there has been little comment or objection to our approach, and certainly no serious, evidenced, contrary view submitted by an objector.

We therefore believe our evidence to support our housing target in the plan to be comprehensive, up-to-date, in line with national policy and fully supported by our Duty to Co-operate neighbouring districts.

**Q2. Is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the proportion of housing to be provided in Peterborough will be effective in addressing the housing requirements arising in Fenland both in terms of the quantum of housing and within appropriate timescales?**

Those authorities forming the Cambridge HMA (including Fenland) are confident that it is entirely reasonable for 2,500 homes 'needed' in the Cambridge HMA area should be (indeed, already are) provided for in Peterborough. This is in line with local, sub-regional, (former) regional and national policy. Most importantly, Peterborough City Council (PCC) also agrees to the apportionment.

CD016 has further details on how the apportionment was arrived at.

Please also see a newly prepared evidence document entitled '*Housing Targets In The Cambridge HMA Area: An Evidence Report to explain why it is appropriate for 2,500 homes 'needed' in the Cambridge HMA to be met in Peterborough*' (CD040 – published in the on-line library in November 2013) and a separate Statement of Common Ground (CD041 - published in the on-line library in November 2013) which has been agreed between FDC and PCC in response to this particular Inspector question.

Overall, the Council is very confident that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the proportion of housing to be provided in Peterborough will be effective in addressing the housing requirements arising in Fenland both in terms of the quantum of housing and within appropriate timescales.

**Q3. Will sufficient jobs be created commensurate with housing provision and to support the forecast increase in population over the plan period?**

It is obviously not possible to answer this question with 100% certainty. The creation (and indeed loss) of jobs is in constant flux, and almost entirely in the hands of the market and national economic position. Even measuring current jobs is difficult, whilst forecasting them is even more challenging.

However, a Local Plan can *facilitate* the creation and preservation of businesses and jobs, and should do so in a way which aims to maintain an appropriate balance between new homes and access to local jobs.

Core Document CD022 ('Employment Evidence Report') sets out in detail what, broadly, FDC consider to be an appropriate forecast for job growth, and then converts that, using a generally agreed approach, into land requirements. The Core Strategy takes those conclusions and provides for the required new land. The Core Strategy is then broadly supportive of businesses which seek to expand in Fenland, creating jobs.

However, the creation of job is not limited to (nor indeed probably best communicated through) a Local Plan. That is why FDC prepared, alongside the Proposed Submission Core Strategy, an Economic Development Strategy for the district (CD018). This Strategy provides a comprehensive overview of the Fenland economy and sets out a clear vision, approach and action plan to delivering economic success to the District.

Collectively, therefore, FDC is confident that it is doing all it can to facilitate the creation of jobs in Fenland, not just through the Core Strategy, but through its wider corporate roles.

## **Policy CS2 – Facilitating Health and Wellbeing of Fenland Residents**

**Q4. For large developments, Policy CS2 requires that the Design & Access statement must include commentary as to how this policy has been met. Is the stated preference for this to be demonstrated through the use of a Health Impact Assessment necessary and justified by local circumstances? If so, should this be a requirement rather than a preference?**

Government has increasingly made it clear that Local Plans should avoid local standards unless they can be robustly defended locally. FDC agrees with this principle, and the thrust of the plan as a whole is flexibility rather than prescriptive. It avoids detailed, local standards and policy.

Turning to CS2 specifically, FDC sees the improvement of the health and wellbeing of its residents to be a top priority, especially in the face of the evidence which demonstrates Fenland residents have some significant health inequalities. CD035 sets out further context in support of progressing this area of policy.

As such, FDC consider it entirely reasonable, based on the local evidence and corporate desire to improve health (and not forgetting that town planning emerged as a discipline via a desire to improve the health of the nation), that developers, especially of large sites, should explicitly demonstrate how they have considered health issues and taken into account such issues in the design and layout of their proposals.

However, reflecting the national approach, FDC does not want to insist developers follow a rigid approach to demonstrating that their proposals contribute to delivering a healthy environment. Instead, it suggests a HIA as a preferred approach, due to the consistency advantages in following such an approach. But should a developer prefer to demonstrate the health merits of the submitted proposals in an alternative format, FDC sees no reason why this should not be acceptable. Indeed, to insist on one type of assessment process in a long-term plan such as this Core Strategy would prevent a developer taking advantage off a new approach, should one be developed nationally as best practice.

In short, therefore, FDC is right to seek developers to consider health through the design process, but equally FDC believe developers should be permitted a degree of flexibility as to how they consider and demonstrate such matters.

## **Policy CS3 - Settlement hierarchy**

**Q5. Is the identification of broad locations for growth an appropriate & effective strategy for delivering growth?**

Yes, it is (provided - as is the case with the Fenland Core Strategy - only a small proportion of overall growth is identified via this method).

First, it is acceptable in principle - the NPPF, at para 4, states that local plans should “identify a supply of specific, developable sites or **broad locations** for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15”. (FDC emphasis added)

Second, for Fenland, just 1,750 homes are identified to come forward via ‘broad locations’ out of a total of 11,000 (16%, or approximately 3 years’ worth out of the 20 year plan period). This appears acceptable and in line with the NPPF.

Third, there is nothing in the Core Strategy which expressly prevents growth coming forward in the broad locations. Rather, they are identified as broad locations because at this stage it is not yet possible to identify the precise boundaries of such sites until further detailed site work has been done (eg on flood risk matters). By identifying them as broad locations gives flexibility and, arguably, by doing so actually increases the prospect for appropriate and effective growth (i.e. a detailed boundary set now on sites where there remains some doubt as to the most effective site boundary could actually prevent growth coming forward or prevent the most sustainable solution).

**Q6. Is the overall scale and distribution of development in the villages sufficient to achieve thriving local communities as set out in the Vision Statement?**

At around 10% of all growth, FDC believes that 1,203 new homes in the villages is a sound level to enable sustainable and thriving villages.

However, it should not be forgotten that, should a particular village (or more accurately a parish council) wish to seek growth beyond what the policies of the Core Strategy generally indicates, then it is free to pursue a Neighbourhood Plan. Indeed, policy CS12 directs communities down that route, should they feel extra growth is needed in their locality.

**Q7. Policy CS3 is not specific in terms of the scale of individual developments that may be acceptable in Growth Villages and Limited Growth Villages. Does this policy provide a clear indication of how a decision maker should react to a development proposal in accordance with paragraph 154 of the NPPF?**

Whilst CS3 is not specific, it should be read alongside Policy CS12(A) which does set an overall limit of 10% in total, for all proposals combined, unless local support is clearly demonstrated for more. CD033 gives specific numbers in this regard for each village.

It is accepted that Policy CS3 could be more specific, and indeed an early draft of the Core Strategy (2012 version) did include a limit of 9 for Limited Growth Villages and 3 for Small Villages (but no specific limit for Growth Villages). However, such limits were removed from the later versions of the plan in order to enable the decision maker to determine on a case by case basis what an appropriate level should be for a particular village/site, reflecting the fact that there is a very wide range in size, format and function of Fenland’s villages. A single figure in a policy therefore may be misleading or misused, and instead the 10% rule of CS12 acts as an appropriate ‘back stop’ to prevent excessive and/or unwanted large amounts of growth in a particular village.

On a separate matter, in writing this Statement it has been noted that the opening paragraph of Policy CS12(A) refers to the ‘thresholds set out in Policy CS3’. This is not particularly clear and a modification to replace the word ‘thresholds’ with ‘settlement hierarchy’ would be a more accurate and clearer cross reference to Policy CS3. A modification is therefore proposed accordingly (Proposed Modification: MPC/4/020).

**Q8. Is the inclusion of Wisbech St Mary as a Growth Village justified having regard to the evidence and all reasonable alternatives (in particular Elm and Leverington)?**

The evidence for the inclusion of Wisbech St Mary as a Growth Village is set out in the Fenland Settlement Hierarchy Study Report (CD032) prepared in January 2013. Paragraph 6.11 of CD032 sets out the criteria for a settlement to fall into a Growth Village category. In short a settlement should have a population of 1,500 or more. It must act as a service centre for its rural hinterland and must possess all of the basic facilities and services with at least a small range of shops. Therefore as a minimum it would expect to have a daily post office facility, at least one convenience shop and some other shop or takeaway/restaurant, a primary school, doctor's surgery and some employment base.

The Appendix to CD032 – Services and Facilities in Fenland Villages sets out a comparison between all of the Fenland settlements including Elm, Leverington and Wisbech St Mary. All three have a population over 1500 and there are few differences between the three in terms of the actual facilities provided.

Differences which can be identified from the appendix are that Wisbech St Mary has 2 convenience stores (1 each in Elm and Leverington), Elm has 1 other shop, a hairdressers (0 in Wisbech St Mary and Leverington), Leverington and Wisbech St Mary have 1 takeaway/restaurant each (0 in Elm), Leverington has 3 public houses/social clubs (2 each in Elm and Wisbech St Mary) and Wisbech St Mary has 2 places of worship (1 each in Elm and Leverington).

All have the same access to a secondary school but the bus service frequency is better for Elm and Wisbech St Mary (scores 3) than Leverington (scores 2). All three are located on B classified roads, but in the cases of Elm and Wisbech St Mary these are located on key road routes between two market towns; in both cases March and Wisbech but by different routes. Residents in Elm and Leverington will be able to access a doctor's surgery in Wisbech, and those in Wisbech St Mary the surgery at Church End east of Parson Drove.

Both Elm and Wisbech St Mary have some significant sources of employment local to the village; in the case of Wisbech St Mary, Delamore Nurseries and for Elm, Fenmarc food production which are both about 1.0km from the respective village centre. All three have scope to expand in the lowest risk flood zone (Flood Zone 1).

However, there are three key reasons why Wisbech St Mary is preferred to the other two:

First of all in the early stages of the preparation of the Core Strategy Wisbech St Mary Parish Council indicated that it wished to be included a Growth Village in the Settlement Hierarchy. In the spirit of localism FDC considered this to be a reasonable request to consider as many of the criteria for services and facilities were met.

Secondly, looking beyond the provision of facilities and services, the Council is required to consider the spatial impact of new developments for the district as a whole. Both Elm and Leverington are located very close to the outskirts of the market town of Wisbech; Elm to the south and Leverington to the north-west. A significant expansion of either of these two settlements combined with development coming forward in the Core Strategy's proposed strategic allocations and broad locations for growth in Wisbech, particularly to the south and west, would result in the risk of the coalescence of settlements such as to potentially result in a "Greater Wisbech" conurbation in the future. This would risk the loss identity of either Elm and Leverington settlement as a Fenland village, which is an outcome that the Council would wish to avoid.

Wisbech St Mary is located further away from Wisbech than the other two meaning that growth would not result in a large conurbation or any loss of identity as a village settlement.

Thirdly, one of the Council's primary criteria for establishing whether a settlement should be a growth village is that it should act as a service centre for its rural hinterland. Wisbech St Mary serves a number of surrounding villages such as Guyhirn, Murrow, Tholomas Drove, Parson Drove, Church End, and Gorefield as well as more dispersed hamlets and dwellings.

Elm and Leverington inevitably provide some services for their respective rural hinterlands but their close proximity to Wisbech means that they have a lesser role as rural service centres than Wisbech St Mary. For instance people seeking services and facilities from the surrounding rural areas of each settlement are potentially as likely to travel to Wisbech as they would be to go to either Leverington or Elm.

The Council recognises that in choosing villages for a particular category in the Settlement Hierarchy that a range of competing factors needs to be considered. However, it is satisfied that in preferring Wisbech St Mary over Elm and Leverington as a Growth Village in the northern part of the district that this can be justified on sound planning grounds. The Council is therefore satisfied that taking all reasonable alternatives into account that the identification of Wisbech St Mary as a Growth Village in the Core Strategy is fully justified.

**Q9. Policy CS3 is cross referenced with Policy CS12 in relation to 'Limited Growth Villages' and development 'Elsewhere' only. However Policy CS12 appears to relate to new development in all 'villages' generally without making any distinction. Is there inconsistency between these policies?**

FDC wishes to confirm that CS12 does indeed relate to new development in all villages.

To prevent any confusion or potential for inconsistency between policies, it is suggested that the cross reference to CS12 is removed in the two locations in Policy CS3. The Fenland Core Strategy should be read as a whole, and the fact that it is a relatively short plan with few policies (compared with other plans of other authorities) means there is no need for cross referencing like this, especially if it creates the potential for confusion or inconsistency.

Proposed Modification MPC/3/007 would make those changes.

**Q10. Is Policy CS3 and the supporting text, in particular paragraph 3.34, consistent with the NPPF in terms of the Council's approach to development in the countryside? The NPPF refers to local planning authorities 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it' rather than 'strictly controlling it'?**

[FDC Note: It is assumed the Inspector is referring to paragraph 3.4.3 rather than 3.34]

It is accepted that the phrase 'strictly controlled' is a throw back to the phraseology previously used in the now deleted PPS7, and it would be sensible to use phrases and terms in the NPPF (notably NPPF paragraphs 17 and 55). Paragraph 3.4.3 is therefore proposed to be amended – see Proposed Modification MPC/3/008 which replaces paragraph 3.4.3 with:

**"3.4.3 It is Government policy that development in the countryside should be recognised for its intrinsic character and beauty, whilst supporting thriving communities within it. Government policy also states that isolated homes in the countryside should be**

**avoided unless there are special circumstances** ~~strictly controlled, in order to conserve its character and natural resources.~~ By identifying the settlement hierarchy and distinguishing between settlements and the countryside, the policy restricts development in the countryside other than that where a rural location is fully justified **by special circumstances.**”

However, Policy CS3 (and indeed CS12) appear to otherwise be consistent with the NPPF, and offer scope for rural communities to thrive in a sustainable manner. No changes to Policy CS3 are therefore suggested.

**Q11. Policy CS3 contains a note that relates to development at Wimblington and Doddington. (a) In light of the possible constraints in relation to the capacity of the sewage network referred to, is the inclusion of these villages as ‘Growth Villages’ justified having regard to all reasonable alternatives? (b) By what means will the Council be satisfied that capacity is available to accommodate a development in Wimblington or Doddington?**

The evidence for the inclusion of Doddington and Wimblington in this category is set out in the Fenland Settlement Hierarchy Study Report (CD032) prepared in January 2013. Paragraph 6.11 of CD032 sets out the criteria for a settlement to fall into a Growth Village category. In short a settlement should have a population of 1,500 or more. It must act as a service centre for its rural hinterland and must possess all of the basic facilities and services with at least a small range of shops. Therefore as a minimum it would expect to have a daily post office facility, at least one convenience shop and some other shop or takeaway/restaurant, a primary school, doctor’s surgery and some employment base.

The Appendix to CD032 – Services and Facilities in Fenland Villages sets out a comparison between all of the Fenland settlements including Doddington and Wimblington. From this it can be seen that both settlements meet all of the criteria. The only other settlement in the southern part of the district that meets all of the criteria is Manea which is also included as a Growth Village.

The Council is aware of potential constraints of the sewerage network and at the Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) at Doddington. However it considers that with the proposed level of growth in both settlements (in the region of a total of about 150 – 200 dwellings during the plan period) that the WWTW and sewerage network will be able to cope with the additional growth.

Anglian Water Services (AWS) has advised that it will assess the capacity of the sewerage network when approached by a developer(s) in Doddington and Wimblington and provide a solution. If any upgrades are required the developer may requisition them via the relevant sections of the Water Industry Act 1991.

The Doddington WWTW discharges into the river system operated by the Middle Level Commissioners (MLC) which has highlighted that its river system is not a gravity flowing one but is artificial and relies on pump drainage which requires regular maintenance. This process incurs costs and the MLC considers that developers who discharge into its system, including AWS, should bear a fair share of the costs incurred proportionate to its operations.

There is currently a legal dispute between AWS and the MLC which is also relevant in relation to the WWTW in Whittlesey and March. Please refer to FDC’s response to Q2 of Matter 9 and Q1 of Matter 11 for more detail. In short, there is a recent example of a legal agreement which was signed between the developer, the Environment Agency, AWS and



South Cambridgeshire District Council to enable contributions to be made for the maintenance of the receiving water course known as Swavesey Main Drain from the Uttons Drove WWTW.

The Council is confident that a similar agreement could form the basis for resolving matters in relation to discharges from the Doddington WWTW and elsewhere within the MLC's river system. In addition to any legal agreement a condition on a planning permission would ensure that all drainage issues were fully considered as part of any development.

As AWS has advised that any upgrades required to the WWTW and sewerage network will be able to accommodate this has provided the Council with confidence that there will be capacity to accommodate growth in Doddington and Wimblington. Furthermore there is a recent example of an agreement to address additional discharges into the receiving water course from a WWTW elsewhere in the area. FDC therefore considers that the inclusion of Doddington and Wimblington as Growth Villages in the Settlement Hierarchy is fully justified and sound.

**Q12. Does the Local Plan sufficiently identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations so that it is clear how a decision maker should react to a development?**

The Council has sought to prepare this local plan so as to be flexible and strategic in nature. It wanted to avoid unnecessary detail or requirement, especially if (a) the NPPF covered the point and/or (b) any such detail would become quickly dated.

Question 12 is clearly paraphrasing the third bullet of Para 50 of the NPPF. However, it is also worth noting that this same paragraph in the NPPF does not stipulate that Local Plans should provide such detail, but that 'local planning authorities' should. As such, FDC's approach is that the Local Plan should confirm that, in Fenland, meeting a wide range of housing need is important and required in Fenland (see, especially, policy CS5) but prefers to keep the detail on a more 'live' basis, namely through the production of regular SHMA updates. The SHMA is a far more appropriate place to regularly update decision makers as to what would be a suitable size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required. A development which clearly did not reflect such need identified in a SHMA, and without good reason for not doing so, could quite rightly be refused permission by virtue of CS5 and the latest SHMA.

This approach (i.e. strategic policy in the Local Plan, detailed requirements in an up to date SHMA) is considered entirely in line with the NPPF and will ensure Local Plan policies retain their longevity beyond the regular (often annual) updating of a SHMA.