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COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY AND

**EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Integrated Approach to Sustainable Rural
Planning in East Northamptonshire

Summary

BAKER

ASSOCIATES

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1 Introduction and background to project

- 1.1 The project has been commissioned by the Countryside Agency, in association with East Northamptonshire Council, with the aim of developing a framework within which planning policies can be developed, that promote integrated sustainability for rural areas. The project is one of the Countryside Agency's positive planning demonstration projects and takes forward and develops previous work for the Agency into the functioning of rural settlements. The study area has been the rural parts of East Northamptonshire District and the immediate purpose has been to inform the Local Development Framework (LDF) being prepared by the Council, but the work and the findings are intended to be generally applicable to other English rural areas.
- 1.2 The overall aim of the planning framework being created for East Northamptonshire, as for elsewhere in England, is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This is the statutory purpose of the planning system. East Northamptonshire Council's and the Countryside Agency's aim is that maintaining the distinctive character of the district's environment and meeting local needs should be part of the pursuit of this objective.
- 1.3 Contributing to the achievement of sustainable development is an ambitious aim for planning, and a complex one. There may be differences in what is sought depending whether the desired outcome is the pursuit of sustainable lifestyles, as far as its possible by the occupants of smaller settlements, or the achievement of the most sustainable pattern of human habitation within a network of settlements. There are very many aspects to achieving greater sustainability too. Land use planning has traditionally approached smaller settlements in a relatively limited way, with containment in order to protect the openness of the countryside, and more recently to reduce the need to travel.
- 1.4 Pursuing sustainable development shifts the emphasis increasingly from policy to outcomes. The task in developing policy becomes one of asking what kind of place is required, what are the economic, social and environmental needs of the community, or what lifestyles would use less resources and provide sustainable communities, and then looking for policies and initiatives that would help to bring about these outcomes.
- 1.5 The new planning system is to be a spatial planning system. This means that development plans at the regional and local level are to be spatial plans, prepared in a more inclusive way in order to embrace a wider range of issues and perspectives, and to be delivered by a greater range of participants gearing their actions and programmes to the achievement of common aims.
- 1.6 This work has been undertaken in this context together with aspirations for a more comprehensive, sophisticated and integrated use of the new planning system.

- 1.7 Previous research suggests that existing rural planning policy does not produce all of the outcomes sought or desired¹. For example, many services and facilities are being lost, insufficient housing is being provided to meet local needs and design does not always respect local characteristics. What is also evident is that policy approaches towards rural areas are frequently created according to broad categorisations of settlements and rarely with sufficient specific understanding of how individual places function and relate to each other. This may mean generalisations are made about how places work and communities behave, and it may sometimes lead to policy responses based on misconceptions.
- 1.8 What is evident from previous research² is that the roles and relationships between settlements are extremely complex and dependent on the physical proximity and accessibility of settlements and the type of activity being considered, as well as on the choices people make. In such circumstances, in order to develop appropriate policy approaches, it is necessary to develop a greater understanding of needs and issues in the rural areas at the local level, possibly through settlement appraisals and local surveys, and preferably with the involvement of the community.
- 1.9 This project has sought to develop a policy framework for parts of rural East Northamptonshire based on an understanding of the needs of the case study settlements examined. From the study results, a rural policy framework has been developed, which might be useful for any rural area in England. The full sustainable rural policy framework is set out in *Chapter 9* and *Appendix D* of the main report.

2 Approach

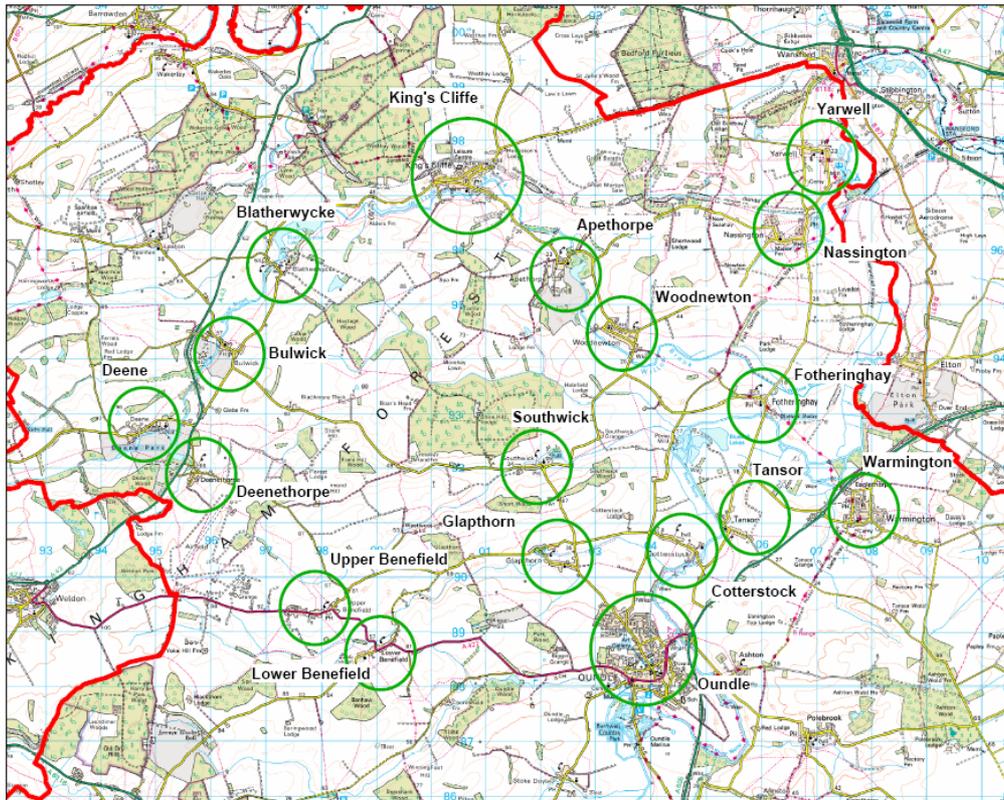
- 2.1 This project has set out to understand how parts of the study area function and relate to each other, in order to develop an appropriate policy response.
- 2.2 A cluster of case study villages were selected for detailed analysis, representing the most rural parts of the District. This sample included Oundle and King's Cliffe, identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS8) as a Rural Service Centre and a proposed Local Service Centre respectively, together with the villages lying between these larger settlements. The use of case study villages has allowed the functionality of settlements and the relationship between settlements to be analysed in depth. It has also enabled the project to look at cross-boundary issues to both the east and west of the district with Corby, Kettering, Peterborough and other service centres.

¹ 'North Northamptonshire Market Towns & Rural Regeneration' Entec (May 2004)

² 'The Role of Rural Settlements as Service Centres' LUC (Jan 2004)

2.3 The villages included in the study are shown on the map below.

Case study villages (Figure 1)



Based on the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright East Northamptonshire Council. Licence No 077862

- 2.4 Baseline information for the study area was collated from the census and other documented sources, such as strategies and plans relating to transport, employment, housing and environment. Firstly, this information was supplemented for the project, by undertaking analysis of the many relevant organisations and partnerships that have identified existing rural issues, by consulting the community and survey work.
- 2.5 Secondly, a specially commissioned postal survey amongst residents in the case study villages was carried out. This obtained responses from a 34% of all households. The survey was designed to gain a greater understanding of settlement roles and of the relationships between them by asking residents how they used local services and facilities. The survey also aimed to understand resident opinions on local issues and perceptions, relevant to their village.
- 2.6 Thirdly, a Stakeholder Group was established to act as a sounding board for the study and also contributing throughout the life of the project on an informal basis. The group informed the project of rural issues and needs existing in the district and to discuss the case study village selection. Further discussions with the group assisted in assessing the outcomes of the resident survey and informing the development of a framework for sustainable rural policies.

3 Achieving greater sustainability

- 3.1 The aim was to create a framework from which policies can be developed which will bring about more sustainable development. Sustainable development is a way of managing change in order to meet needs whilst respecting the environment and conserving finite resources. The policies adopted by planning authorities should represent the best means of contributing to environmental, economic and social objectives with the least harm to any of these.
- 3.2 The sustainability agenda is large and needed to be made manageable for the purposes of this project. The consideration of the policy framework for managing settlements needs to relate to those aspects of sustainability that can be most readily influenced by decisions relating to the performance of those settlements.
- 3.3 The table below identifies the four main components of sustainable development and the types of issues that ought to be considered in relation to them and the future management of change in the study area settlements.

Sustainable development issues (Figure 2)

Social progress	Protection the environment	Prudent use of resources	Stable economy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inclusive - balanced - vibrant • Affordable, local housing • Access to services and community facilities • Local employment • Recreation/leisure/sport • Public transport/ accessibility for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape character • Biodiversity • Land management • Cultural heritage • Settlement pattern and character • Buildings and design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - materials - spaces - scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sustainable construction - transport - renewable - efficiency • Water resources and quality • Waste • Air • Soils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local economies • Recreation and tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities - skills • Land based economies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - materials - skills

- 3.4 The policy framework developed for this project specifically related to these four aspects of sustainable development.

4 Project findings

- 4.1 Travel patterns associated with settlements and groups of settlements are a useful way of understanding the roles of settlements and the relationship between them. Planning policy has an important role to play in influencing these travel patterns and the way that people are able to access services and facilities. The resident survey details the trips people make to fulfil their work, domestic and recreational requirements and demonstrates how different settlements function.

- 4.2 The situation is complex and all the more so because each settlement may perform differently for a variety of activities, with local residents meeting their individual needs for services and facilities from a range of settlements. The varying types of functions and relationships identified work in parallel due to the complexity of people's lives and diversity of rural areas. This integral complexity of relationships and functions has been a key influence to the development of the sustainable policy framework. The study has also confirmed the importance of developing a robust evidence base of rural issues, resident needs and aspirations, as well as developing a robust understanding of settlement roles and relationships.
- 4.3 The findings demonstrate that it is valuable to investigate how settlements are used, but also show that there are likely to be recurring patterns of people's use and movement within and between settlements. By identifying the role of settlements and relationships between them it may be possible to develop policy approaches for a 'category' of settlements.
- 4.4 Once settlements have been categorised it may be possible to apply these settlement categorisations to a framework for sustainable rural policies, as detailed in full within Appendix D (Part 2) of the full report. The framework provides a structure for delivering sustainable rural communities through an integrated policy framework, which incorporates:
- Spatial Policy Framework
 - Topic Based Policy Framework
 - Partnership Working/Community Involvement.

Settlement categorisation

- 4.5 Movement patterns have emerged from people travelling from home to work, leisure, shop and other facilities, and this, perhaps not surprisingly, relates to the number of services available in each settlement. The survey results show that the more services and facilities a settlement has, the more these services are used by a larger number of people, travelling from a wider rural hinterland. The greater number of facilities in a settlement also correlates to an increase in the number of people using them from the settlement's own population.
- 4.6 Within the study area and according to what has been learnt of how settlements meet the requirements of residents, a number of broad categories of settlement types was identified. It is reasonable to say that the settlements encountered fall into one of these types, on the basis that whilst there are very complex variations with everywhere being different, the extent to which the available policy mechanisms can be varied is rather less sophisticated. The key settlement roles and relationship categories drawn are listed below, with the descriptions of the role and relationships for each category outlined in Figure 4, which details the correlating spatial policy criteria.

Settlement categories (Figure 3)

Settlement category	Relationship
Large Urban Centres	Related rural hinterland
Rural Service Centre	Related rural hinterland
Local Service Centre	Related rural hinterland
'Limited Local Service Centre'	Related rural hinterland
Other Service Centres (outside the case study area)	Related rural hinterland
'Dependant Smaller Villages'	No relationship, or network of villages

4.7 The main settlement category identified for the study area is the service centre and related rural hinterland. The service centres can be ranked in relation to number of services/facilities they supply, how much they are used and the extent of rural hinterland that they serve. In East Northamptonshire they include:

- Rural Service Centre – Oundle
- Local Service Centre – King's Cliffe
- 'Limited Local Service Centre' – Warmington and Nassington.

4.8 Dependant villages is a further category and there are also villages that are best represented as part of a network. Within the case study villages this related to activities such as leisure and recreation for:

- Deene, Deenethorpe, Bulwick and Blatherwycke
- Upper and Lower Benefield.

4.9 In addition to the situations described here, urban centres are key service centres to villages in the study area, particularly for travel to employment, main food shopping and non food shopping, all of which have a high dependence on car travel. Other service centres have also been identified outside the case study area.

Spatial policy framework

4.10 The spatial policy framework reflects national, regional and sub-regional policy, which would direct most development in rural areas to service centres that are perceived as being more sustainable. The spatial framework provides a 'balanced' view on development, which whilst directing the majority of development to the larger urban areas recognises the importance of smaller rural settlements accommodating development that meet local needs, such as affordable housing and retaining services and community facilities.

4.11 Once settlements have been categorised, it is then possible to apply the settlement type to the policy framework. This takes the form of a spatial policy framework, providing guidance on which types of development should be located to each settlement category. The spatial policy framework relating to each settlement category is outlined in the table overleaf.

Spatial policy framework related to settlement categories and function (Figure 4)

Settlement category	Settlement role and relationship	Spatial policy framework
Rural Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A substantial percentage of it's own population are employed in the Rural Service Centre and use it's wide selection of services/facilities. • Extensive rural hinterland attracting people for a wide selection of services, facilities, employment, education and health care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of development in rural areas should be focused in the Rural Service Centres and thereafter in Local Service Centres. • Scale of development to reflect the local character and specific to the site (see topic based and participation framework). • Housing - market housing and affordable housing to meet local need. • Employment – new build and provision for extending existing businesses. • Provision of a wide selection of retail (main food and non-food shopping facilities), banking and professional services, leisure, community facilities, health and education.
Local Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A substantial percentage of it's own population are employed and use a limited selection of services/facilities in the Local Service Centre. • Attracts a limited number of people from neighbouring villages, for convenience shopping, leisure, health care, education and employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Service Centres should accommodate development to support it's own population and immediate neighbouring villages. • Scale of development to reflect the local character and specific to the site (see topic based and participation framework). • Housing - maximise affordable housing to meet local need. • Employment – new build and provision for extending existing businesses. • Provision of a selection of retail (main food and convenience shopping facilities), banking and professional services, leisure, community facilities, health and education.

<p>‘Limited Local Service Centre’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services used almost solely for population of the ‘Limited Local Service Centre’. • Attracts a very limited number of people from a few surrounding villages, for convenience shopping, leisure and employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing – affordable housing for local need. • Employment – extension of existing businesses. • Provision of a limited selection of local shops, banking and professional services, community facilities, health and primary/nursery education. • Scale of development to reflect the local character and specific to the site (see topic based and participation framework).
<p>Dependant villages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small villages with limited supply of individual services and community facilities that serve their own residents, which to a very limited extent is used by residents of neighbouring villages. • Residents mainly dependent on service centres. • Local needs met through initiatives that do not arise from planning policy, such as mobile services/facilities and flexible public transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most development would be viewed as unsustainable, due to general dependence for employment, services and facilities in other centres. • Any development in these villages should concentrate on delivering for local need or help to retain existing services and facilities. • Scale of development to reflect the local character and specific to the site (see topic based and participation framework).
<p>Network of villages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made up of a grouping or network of dependant villages – see criteria above. • No identified service centre or ‘dominant’ settlement for a particular service or facility. • Grouping/network of villages which have a recognised relationship with each other. • The size of each settlement and flow of travel is equal or very similar between villages. • These settlements rely more on larger settlements for the majority of needs, i.e. work and key services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any development in these villages should concentrate on delivering for local need or help to retain existing services and facilities. • Scale of development to reflect the local character and specific to the site (see topic based and participation framework).

Plan for individual needs

- 4.12 This study established that many individual needs are not being met, however, many of these local needs can be met by other delivery mechanisms, such as mobile services or flexible transport schemes. It is important for planning policy to be aware of these other delivery mechanisms and also, wherever possible, facilitate and support these delivery tools.

Topic policy framework

- 4.13 An important consideration that was particularly corroborated by the survey of residents, is the complex issue of new development taking place. Development is often seen as meeting the social and economic needs of individuals and helping to maintain local services on the one hand whilst, damaging the character of settlements and dividing communities on the other. Development that provides for the housing needs of people with long association with a settlement or which increases the economic activity in a village, particularly where there are jobs taken up by local residents, is viewed as desirable by the residents.
- 4.14 However, the resident survey and stakeholder group raised concern about past development, particularly for housing, that has been poorly designed, out of scale and developed on inappropriate sites. The study has highlighted that not only is identifying the most sustainable spatial location for a particular development type essential in providing sustainable communities, but it is also important to ensure proposals are 'good enough to approve'. This project highlights that the decision making process needs to be informed at a local level and this study is able to supply additional policy criteria. These types of criteria have in inputted into the topic based and participation frameworks, which supplement the spatial policy framework, in maximising the delivery of integrated sustainable rural policy framework. The topic based policy framework relates to:
- Community/Social
 - Creating Sustainable Communities
 - Affordable Housing
 - Access/Transport
 - Facilities/Services
 - Employment Generating Development
 - General framework
 - Environment
 - Design and scale.

Partnership framework

- 4.15 This study has confirmed that planning policy cannot deliver sustainable rural communities alone. Other delivery mechanisms are able to support planning policy and/or deliver where planning cannot. Planning should seek to support these other mechanisms, such as rural transport schemes or mobile services.
- 4.16 This project has also identified the importance of partnership working and community involvement in providing baseline information and supporting delivery of development, to ensure that development is provided in the right location to meet identified local need. The partnership framework provides recommendations on the available partnerships and mechanisms available to planning policy, in working with rural counterparts.
- 4.17 Planning policy should develop and build upon existing partnerships with other organisations/strategies and include robust community involvement. Numerous organisations and charities work at a more local level, such as the work being completed by the Rural Housing Enabler and community transport schemes, who involve residents and Parish Councils in planning and delivery, through a flexible approach. It is the responsibility of planning policy to enable and promote these flexible approaches of delivery.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 This study has confirmed the complexity of rural areas and that planning policy needs to be based on a better understanding of the roles and relationships between settlements, detailed evidence base and involve communities, if local needs are to be met in a sustainable way.
- 5.2 The findings of this project have informed the development of rural policy framework for East Northamptonshire, which may also be applicable to other rural areas of England.