



Design for the Future

Growth Options for the District

April 2004

Did you know that East Northamptonshire is part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area?

East Northamptonshire Council wants you to have your say about where housing development should be located between now and 2021.

Background - what is the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area?

The County of Northamptonshire was identified by the Government early in 2003 as part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands 'Growth Area' (MKSM). This Growth Area is one of four. The others are Thames Gateway, Ashford in Kent, and the M11-Cambridge corridor, recently extended northwards to include Peterborough. The Government's aim is to find room for the excess housing growth from London and the south-east. All Northamptonshire district councils have accepted the idea of extra housing development only on the condition that employment, transport, health, education and other services are planned in first. They also feel that the balance should be corrected after having years of housing growth across the county without this supporting 'infrastructure'.

The growth area situation is a change of approach because until recently attempts were being made to reduce incomers to the area, plan for local needs and try to shift housing development north to the disadvantaged parts of the East Midlands region.

The regional assemblies for the East Midlands, South East and East of England produced a draft 'sub-regional' strategy for the MKSM growth area last summer. There is a public examination of that strategy, and all the objections to it, taking place at the moment in Northampton (contact mksm@northamptonshire.gov.uk for more details). Apart from Milton Keynes and all of Northamptonshire, that strategy looks at large scale growth around Bedford and Luton/Dunstable.

There are two areas proposed for focussing growth within Northamptonshire. Firstly, in and around Northampton, with some additional growth at Daventry and Towcester. Secondly, in and around Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough, with additional growth in East Northamptonshire District. At the moment the draft strategy sees this as being mainly at Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough but there could also be some growth at Thrapston and Oundle and one or two larger villages, such as King's Cliffe. Raunds seems to have been left out of the strategy but the Council has suggested that it should be viewed in a similar way to market towns such as Thrapston.

Sustainable Communities

The growth areas have been promoted by the Government as part of their nationwide “Sustainable Communities Plan”. Generally, government policy considers large ‘urban’ areas to be the most ‘Sustainable’ places to put new housing development. The theory is that more people will then have easier access to health, education, leisure, shopping and employment, by walking or by public transport. There will be less need to travel by car, thereby reducing pollution and helping to limit climate change. The work done by the regional assemblies in preparing the draft sub-regional strategy, has therefore paid most attention to the biggest towns and looked for opportunities to make them bigger still. Overall, the draft strategy pays little attention to the needs of smaller towns and even less to the needs of villages.

Aside from Rushden, East Northamptonshire District is based around five small towns and over fifty villages. One of the Council’s priorities is to achieve Sustainable Communities across the district, not just in the larger towns. To the Council, sustainability means more than just reducing the need to travel.

It means finding a future for all existing communities, however small, and making sure that all people within them have reasonable access to services, jobs, housing and leisure, at the same time as protecting the landscape and the unique character of each and every place.

The Council does not think it is reasonable to write off rural areas as being unsustainable, simply on the basis that they already have less jobs and services and most people have no choice other than to use the car to get about. We want to find ways to keep rural communities going, plan for their local housing and leisure needs, create employment and try to save village facilities.

Do you think that rural communities - villages and market towns - need some housing development to maintain services, support job creation and meet local needs?

If so, do you think the same is true for all sizes and types of settlement, or should there be varying approaches?



What housing development is already planned in East Northamptonshire?

One of the important things to remember is that East Northamptonshire has seen quite a lot of house building over the past 20 years or so. The attractive environment and relatively short commuting distance to larger towns has combined with the fact that house and land prices have been lower than in the south east, making the south of the district especially popular with house buyers and house builders alike. Because the district has a large rural area, with market towns and small villages, previous Plans have looked for less development than has occurred in practice.

The county Structure Plan that is in force now planned for about 400 new houses per year (between 1996 and 2016). In fact there have been on average over 600 houses a year completed across the district since 1996.

New jobs, health facilities, education, shopping and leisure have not matched this housing growth. The Council recently adopted an Interim Policy designed to restrict new planning permissions for housing to brownfield sites in the short term, so we can plan to balance future housing with jobs and services, keeping our options open for the longer term.

Are you aware of this Interim Policy and do you think it will help with the longer term aim of balancing housing with jobs and services?

Last year, the Council asked planning consultants DTZ Pinda to carry out an assessment of the district, looking at what development is already planned, which areas may be able to take further growth, and what supporting services would be needed to redress the balance and match new housing growth. Their findings are available as a technical background report to this paper.

The assessment looked at the areas around all the towns and larger villages and identified Opportunity Zones for further analysis. These zones took account of development 'constraints', for instance: protected landscape, nature conservation or heritage areas; areas at risk of flooding; contaminated land; importance for agriculture. The zones were then scored against their impact on the environment and also against other issues such as accessibility to jobs and services, and contribution to regeneration. The scoring meant that areas were identified as having a positive, negative or neutral impact. More detailed work was then carried out to look at how much housing development could take place in the positive and neutral areas, and what new services and facilities might be needed to balance this. See the map on page 6 for an overview of these areas and of where housing development has already been planned.





Some figures:

The Northamptonshire part of the draft MKSM sub regional strategy covers the period between 2001 and 2021. Since 2001 around 1070 houses have already been completed. There are currently a further 2700 or so that already have planning permission (referred to as 'commitments' on the plan in this discussion paper).

There are more sites already identified where less certainty is attached - they do not yet have planning permission:

- the Council recently looked at the built up areas of the six towns and estimated that brownfield and other sites had 'urban potential' for at least another 2100 houses over the next 15 to 20 years, without extending development outwards into the countryside.
- additional greenfield sites identified for development in the last Local Plan for the district, but without planning permission at present, could take over 700 more houses.
- Over 400 houses could be provided on 'other sites' at King's Cliffe and south Rushden, where the Council has adopted 'development briefs', and a large brownfield site in Irthlingborough that now looks likely to be developed for housing over the next few years, although it was not included in the 'urban potential' estimate given above.

All of the above add up to about 7000 houses and most of the sites are in the south of the district, particularly in Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough. As the draft MKSM sub regional strategy only identifies scope in the district for 7200 houses in the entire period up to 2021 (referred to as Growth Level A in the consultants technical report) this gives the Council little flexibility to plan for sustainable communities across the rest of the area.

So, it looks as if the pressure could remain in the bigger towns to the south, and development here would be in line with the Government's 'sequential approach'.

There has been a local reaction against continued housing development in the built up areas of the south. People feel that such 'town cramming' by squeezing development into every 'infill' and 'backland' area, is causing congestion, parking problems, damaging local character, taking away opportunities for quiet recreation and nature conservation.

Do you think there has been too much town cramming in recent years? If so, what sorts of areas do you think should be kept free of development, particularly within the three towns of Higham Ferrers, Rushden and Irthlingborough?

What are the possible areas for new development?

The planning consultants found that there are large areas around the west and north of Raunds, north of Ringstead and north of Brigstock, where there are few environmental constraints and where development might have a positive impact overall.

Do you think that Raunds should be the focus of more housing developments - with the condition that more jobs and better facilities come with it? If so, in which direction should the town grow?

Ringstead has already had a lot of development and is the second largest village in the district. The Parish Council has told us fairly recently that further development would not be supported.

Is there any support for Ringstead growing to the north and if so what else is needed to support new housing?

Brigstock is a large village with quite a good level of services and good links to Corby. There is a lot of land between the village and the bypass that could be developed.

Do you think that development to the north of Brigstock should be supported? If yes, do you think it should be housing only, or are there other uses that should be mixed in?

Other large areas where the consultants felt that development impacts would be neutral overall are as follows:

East of Higham Ferrers and Rushden - other side of bypass
West of Irthlingborough
North of Woodford (in the longer term)
South of Raunds
South of Thrapston
South west of Islip
West of Oundle
South of Warmington
South of Easton on the Hill
West of Yarwell

What are your feelings about development in these areas? Is new housing supported in any or all of them and on what conditions?

King's Cliffe is a local service centre that has a local plan housing site and further land covered by a development brief (one of the 'other sites' mentioned above), both north of Wood Road. Altogether about 100 houses could be built on this land. The consultants found that further development to the south of King's Cliffe would have a negative impact.

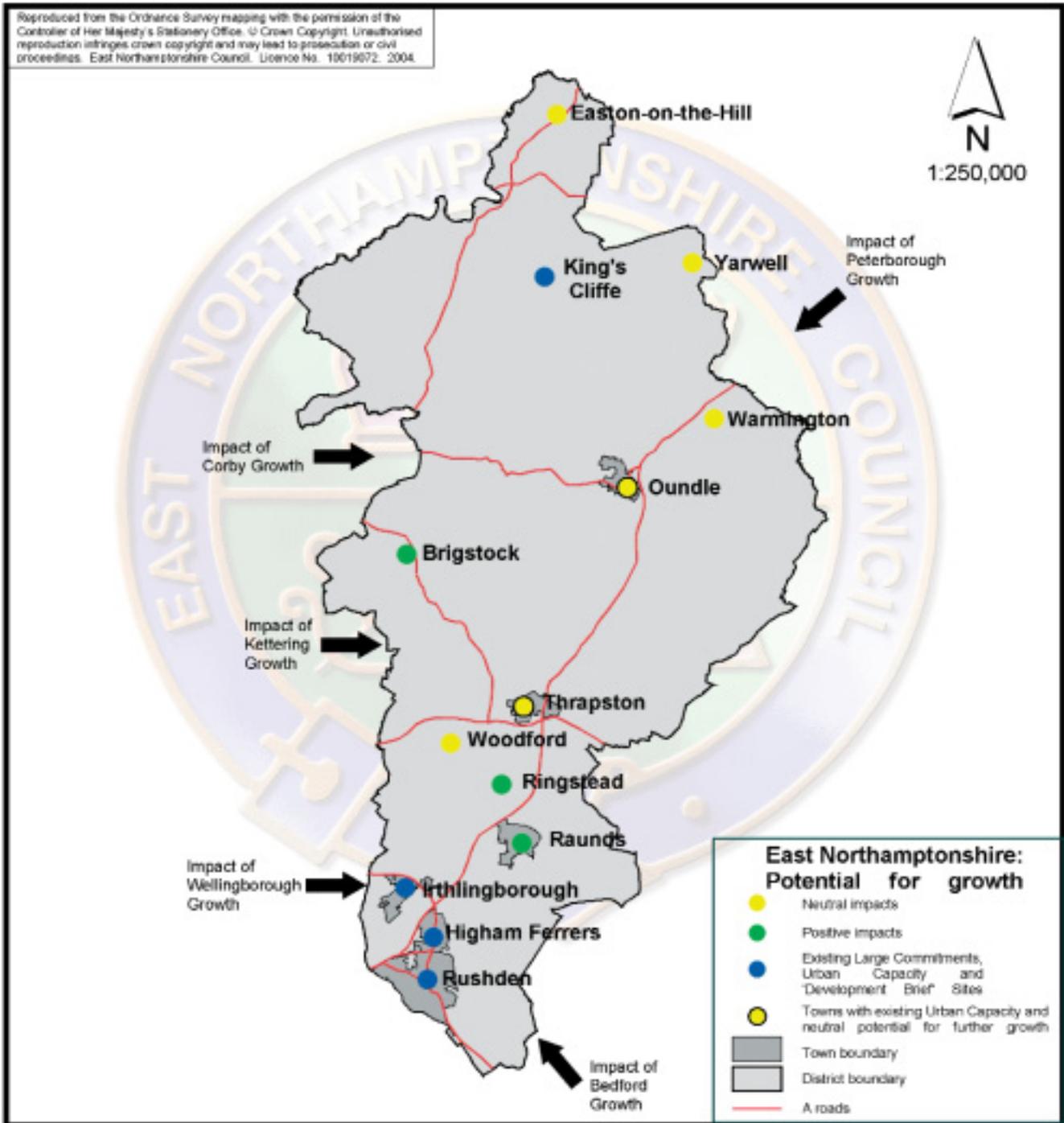
If these existing sites in King's Cliffe are developed over the next 15 years, should it be for a mixture of development and facilities, or just for housing? If just housing, what may be needed elsewhere in the village to balance housing growth, in the way of jobs, services or transport links?

The impact of growth in towns surrounding East Northamptonshire

East Northamptonshire is surrounded by larger towns that are nearly all part of a growth area - Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby, Bedford and Peterborough are all identified for major growth. The pressures for development in these towns will have an impact on the district and particularly on the market towns and villages in the north.

Planning applications will soon be made to Corby Council and to East Northamptonshire Council for a new Sustainable Urban Extension to the east of Corby, on the Priors Hall site and adjoining land. This will cater for the needs of Corby and help its regeneration but it could have a large impact on rural Deene Parish.

Options for growth to 2021 and beyond



Oundle and a lot of villages look to Peterborough for employment, shopping and leisure. Can Peterborough's growth be managed in a way that does not put extra pressure on the attractive villages near to its border?

How should the Council plan for the right amount of development to meet local needs and sustain local communities in the face of pressure from surrounding towns?

Development East of Wellingborough will over time come very close to the boundary with East Northamptonshire, particularly in the Irthlingborough area.

In the villages, do you support continuing the past 'infilling' policy within village development limits, or do you think that small well planned extensions are a better way of sustaining communities whilst not spoiling their character?

Supporting new housing with new services and facilities

The consultant's technical report looks at a balance of growth across the district and not all concentrated in the south. It looks at a total amount of development which is less than that happening now, but more than that contained in the draft MKSM strategy (referred to as Growth Level B in the technical report). Taking amount and general distribution of development into account, the consultants have asked service providers what new facilities may be required to support housing development in the period up to 2021.

taken account of as well as the further potential for development on some of the positive and neutral scoring areas.

Here we must not forget that a lot of development on already planned sites will lead to a need for new facilities. This must be

New primary schools would be needed in all of the towns and extensions to all of the secondary schools. Extra doctors would also be needed in all towns. Improvements to main roads and junctions would be needed, particularly to the A605, A45 and A6. More employment land is likely to be needed in the Oundle area.

Recreation facilities and 'green infrastructure' such as the River Nene Regional Park, need to come with any new housing growth.



Your views

We would like to hear your views on the options for locating new housing development, and on development issues in general. You can send comments by FREEPOST to:

Strategy and Policy Directorate
Planning Policy
FREEPOST NH2352
East Northamptonshire Council
East Northamptonshire House
Cedar Drive
Thrapston
Northamptonshire
NN14 4LZ

Alternatively you can e-mail to
localplan@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk

You can also visit a chat room facility to stimulate debate and exchange views at
www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/forum/

You should note that all responses will be made available to the public. The comments and details of all respondents will be recorded on the Council's Local Development Framework database.

It would be helpful if your comments could reach us by the end of July 2004 to help with the preparation of Local Development Documents expected to be published during 2005.

Discussion papers are also available on the Rural North and on Higham Ferrers and the surrounding villages. Over the next few months we will be publishing further discussion papers on other areas within the District. A discussion paper on Irthlingborough and surrounding area is to follow in April, and the towns and surrounding areas of Oundle, Raunds, Rushden and Thrapston in the succeeding months. These discussion papers can be found on our website at
www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/pp/service/detail.asp?id=1298

If you require any assistance or would like to discuss any issues raised in this document, please feel free to speak to one of our planners within the Planning Policy Section on (01832) 742142 or 742134 or 742221.

Please click link below to view the Technical Report
<http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/ppimageupload/Image7849.PDF>

