

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN

EXAMINATION HEARINGS

HOMEWORK NOTE 6

MATTER 4: THE SPATIAL STRATEGY / DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT

ISSUE 2: BEYOND THE HARLOW AREA, IS THE DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE PLAN JUSTIFIED HAVING REGARD TO THE DEFINED SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

HW6 - SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

1. The Council provides this note which concerns Matter 4, Issue 2 and the Inspector's request that the Council provide details of
 - (i) how the hierarchy of settlements was arrived at; and
 - (ii) whether settlements were re-assigned within the hierarchy and, if so, the reasons for any re-assignment.
2. The outcomes of the Green Belt Review (Stage 1) and Settlement Hierarchy were reported to the 3 September 2015 meeting of the Council's Cabinet.
3. The Cabinet Report (EB139) for the 3 September 2015 meeting explains (at paragraphs 6 to 9) that:
 - "6. *To inform the preparation of the Local Plan a Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper (see Appendix 3) has been prepared. This document seeks to identify the types of settlements that exist in Epping Forest District and how they function. This has provided a mechanism to identify the areas of the Green Belt that should be analysed in greater detail as part of the Stage 2 (Detailed) Assessment. There is no nationally recommended methodology or best practice for establishing a Settlement Hierarchy, therefore a simple approach has been taken, which seeks only to determine*

the level of services and facilities that currently exist within each settlement. The analysis does not make any detailed assessment of current usage levels, capacity opening hours, or the potential for expansion. These matters will be addressed in detail as part of the overall preparation of the Local Plan, and in particular the formulation of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the District.

7. *The Settlement Hierarchy identifies four categories of settlement – Town, Large Village, Small Village and Hamlet. Broad definitions are provided within the Technical Paper, although it is important to note that the categories in themselves, and the placement of each settlement within those categories does not infer that the settlements within each category are the same, only that they share similar levels of services and facilities.*
8. *For the purposes of the Green Belt Review (Stage 1), the Settlement Hierarchy has been used to determine the areas of the District in which the Green Belt should be examined in further detail. The NPPF provides support for this approach, in that development should be located in the most sustainable locations. To this end, the areas highlighted in Fig. 18 of the Green Belt Review (Stage 1) Report will be considered further.*
9. *Town and Parish Councils were provided an opportunity to engage with the Council in the preparation of the Green Belt Review (Stage 1) and the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper. A presentation with opportunity for questions was given, and a six week period for fact checking and comment on the two reports was provided to the Local Councils, ending on 27 July 2015. Comments were received from 20 of the 24 Town and Parish Councils within the District, and 11 District Councillors. Those comments have been taken into account and, where appropriate, have informed changes to the draft Report and draft Technical Paper."*

4. Paragraphs 14 to 20 of the Cabinet Report (EB139) explain in detail the manner in which the draft Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper had been amended in response to extensive comments received to improve the accuracy of the services and facilities identified for each settlement. The Report confirms (at paragraph 14) that the amendments had caused the scoring attained by some settlements to be amended with consequential changes to its position in the Settlement Hierarchy, which is included in tabular form following paragraph 18.

5. In respect of the intended role of the Settlement Hierarchy, paragraph 15 of the Cabinet Report stated:

"15. A number of comments suggested amendments to the Technical Paper which seek to introduce matters relating to the capacity of a settlement to provide services and facilities for the existing population, and any potential increases to the population. Whilst such matters will be important to the overall preparation of the Local Plan, it is not the role of the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper to address these matters. Such issues will be

investigated and addressed in detail when individual parts of the Local Plan are drafted for each settlement, and in particular, during the preparation of the draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan."

6. As for the classification of certain settlements, paragraph 19 of the Report explained:

"19. Abridge and Lower Nazeing are classified as small villages (not large villages), which is due to the closure of a number of services and facilities that had previously been identified. The settlements of Matching Green, Matching Tye and Matching have been combined, as comments received identified that these three very rural settlements have an interdependent relationship. In all other instances, individually named settlements have been assessed and categorised separately. Comments were received about the nature of some settlements, and how the historic relationship of these suggests that there should be an overt link. However, as established at the outset, the approach taken is to assess each location separately."

7. In respect of the Buckhurst Hill, the Cabinet Report specifically addressed the reasons for its classification:

"20. A number of comments were made relating to the identification of Buckhurst Hill as a Town, and considered this should be a Large Village. The updated scoring suggests that Buckhurst Hill is at the bottom of the scoring range for a Town, and therefore should remain as originally drafted. In addition, further consideration of the nature of Buckhurst Hill has identified the compact and urban context of the settlement, and the way in which it has developed as an extension of outer London. This further supports the identification of the settlement as a Town."

8. The Minutes for the 3 September 2015 Cabinet meeting (EB139A) record that the *Principal Planning Officer (Planning Policy)* reminded the Cabinet that the *Green Belt Review* would be a key component of the *Local Plan*, but it would not decide ultimately where future development would take place in the District.

9. Moreover, the Minutes record (at page 4) that:

"There were reservations expressed about the classification of Roydon as a 'Large Village' by the local Member. It was felt that Theydon Bois and Chigwell had many more facilities, and that the Leisure/Sports Facility in Roydon was really more of a Recreational Facility, which would reduce Roydon to the status of a 'Small Village'. The Principal Planning Officer undertook to review the facilities in Roydon and respond to the Member.

Local Members from Chigwell were very disappointed that they had not been provided with a version of the Green Belt Review document which highlighted all the changes that had been made, as the Parish Council was initially promised. It was also disappointing that a number of the comments provided by the Parish

Council had been answered simply with the response "Will be considered in Stage II". It was felt that residents should have been provided with individual answers to each comment made. It was also pointed out that, although not designated as a Conservation Area, Chigwell had over 70 listed buildings, and perhaps it should have been considered for 'Historic Town' status.

The Portfolio Holder reiterated that the Council was always interested in any response from Local Councils, and would be happy to meet with Chigwell Parish Council to discuss their comments further. The Principal Planning Officer added that the comments on a single point from Local Councils had been grouped together to give a single response, and that there had not been a separate response made to each individual comment received. Some of the comments made would be dealt with by the second stage of the Review, and hence they had not been responded to in detail at this stage. However, local members from Chigwell still felt that Local Councils had a right to an individual response for each comment offered, and that Stage II of the Review should not review facts established during Stage I.

[...]

Local Members from Buckhurst Hill expressed their concerns about Buckhurst Hill being classified as a 'Town' rather than a 'Large Village'. Buckhurst Hill had only gained this classification by one point and this was considered unreasonable. There were not enough facilities within Buckhurst Hill, and it was emphasised that it did not have a Bank, Police Station, Fire Station, Leisure Centre or Secondary School. There were also fears that further development could eradicate the green space between Buckhurst Hill and Loughton. The Members requested a discussion between the Portfolio Holder and the Parish Council regarding its status."

10. Furthermore, the Minutes record that:

"[...] the Leader proposed that meetings should be arranged between the Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Planning Policy Officers with Roydon and Buckhurst Hill Parish Councils to discuss their current ranking in the Settlement Hierarchy. [...]"

11. The formal Decision taken by Cabinet was recorded in the Minutes as follows so far as relevant:

- "(3) That meetings be held by the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder and Planning Policy Officers with both Buckhurst Hill and Roydon Parish Councils regarding their assessment in the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper;*
- (4) That the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper be noted and added to the Local Plan Evidence Base, subject to any amendments arising from the meetings with Buckhurst Hill and Roydon Parish Councils;"*

12. As a result of those meetings, in the final published version of the Settlement Hierarchy Technical Paper (EB1007), Buckhurst Hill and Roydon were reclassified as a 'large village' and 'small village' respectively.
13. The reasons for these reclassifications are set out in EB1007 for Buckhurst Hill (at page 36) and Roydon (at pages 61 and 62).