

Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan

Planning Policy Context Analysis July 2021



Cambridgeshire ACRE
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About Cambridgeshire ACRE



Cambridgeshire ACRE is an independent charity established in 1924. We are part of a network of 38 Rural Community Councils across England and are a member of ACRE (the national umbrella for RCCs). We are proud to support local communities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and nearby where appropriate. We put a lot of effort into getting to know our customers so we can understand what they need from us. This ensures we focus on providing products and services that really make a difference to local people as they work in their own communities.

As part of our work we provide a Neighbourhood Planning service for local communities. We have developed this service by building on our skills, knowledge and competencies gained in other project areas such as rural affordable housing and community-led planning and by working with local planning consultants to broaden our capacity.

Our current partners are:



You can find out more about our team and our work from our Neighbourhood Planning Information Leaflet at <https://wordpress.com/view/camsacrenpservice.wordpress.com>

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan: The Planning Policy Context

1.1 This paper sets out the key strategic planning policies that will need to be considered in developing the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 Neighbourhood Planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need.

PART 2 BASIC CONDITIONS

2.1 The Neighbourhood Plan must meet a set of basic planning conditions before it can be put to a referendum and be formally adopted. A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) meets the basic conditions if:

- having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the plan;
- the making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
- the making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority;
- the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations; and
- the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach the requirement of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

2.2 The submission Neighbourhood Plan will need to be accompanied by a Basic Conditions Statement. This document will support the preparation of that statement and can be included as an Appendix to it.

PART 3 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 National planning policy is mainly set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It states that planning should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development: economic, social and environment. Paragraph 11 of NPPF states:

“Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

For plan-making this means that:

- a) plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area, and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;
- b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas , unless:
 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area ; or
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”

3.2 NPPF emphasises the link between themes such as climate change and health, provides guidance on the vitality and vibrancy of towns and rural areas including retail, town centres and employment. It provides advice on transport, high quality infrastructure, good design and healthy communities, whilst conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment. Key areas relevant to policy context are detailed below and are also included in each of the themes.

5 Year Housing Land Supply

3.3 National planning policy requires Local Planning Authorities to significantly boost the supply of housing. Where a local authority does not have a 5 year housing land supply, existing plans are considered out of date and local planning authorities should grant permission unless adverse impacts of doing so would demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

3.4 Critically, a historic lack of a 5 year land supply in East Cambridgeshire has significantly affected the development approach to housing proposals in the district and has resulted in substantive planning applications for housing development being allowed outside the development provisions in the Local Plan.

3.5 An updated Five Year Land Supply Report (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025) published by East Cambridgeshire District Council on 18th December 2020 demonstrates that there is now a 6.09 year Housing Land Supply. A further addendum was published on 1st March 2021 to reflect updates to the Housing Delivery Target.

3.6 The report applies the standard method set out in National Planning Practice Guidance for the calculation of its housing land supply. The framework states that Councils should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites against their housing requirement as set out in the adopted strategic policies or against that local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old (NPPF paragraph 73).

3.7 The Inspector considering a recent appeal at Sutton Road, Witchford was clear that it is appropriate for the Council to use the standard method for the purposes of assessing the five year housing land supply position. The Inspector concluded that based on the standard method, even when using the appellant’s lower estimated figures and without windfall development included, this exercise has established that the Council could demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply. The Inspector considering a further appeal in April 2021 (Main Street, Witchford) also confirmed that the Council’s more recent Housing Land Supply Report has demonstrated that East Cambridgeshire has a 5 year land supply.

Housing Delivery Test

3.8 Paragraph 75 of NPPF states that where the Housing Delivery Test (HDT) indicates that delivery has fallen below 95% of the local planning authority's housing requirement over the previous three years, the local authority should prepare an action plan. Where it is below 85% the Local Planning Authority will be required to find a 20% 'buffer' of additional land to deliver housing. To calculate the HDT measurement for each plan area, the government has divided the number of new homes built ('delivered') in the past three financial years by the number of new homes required in the same period. The HDT measurement figure is expressed as a percentage. The HDT results for East Cambridgeshire, published on 19th January 2021, report a percentage of 87% and therefore East Cambridgeshire is required to prepare an Action Plan. If this figure were to fall below 85%, a 20% buffer would need to be added to the 5 year housing land supply calculations and would affect the 5 year land supply position.

3.9 East Cambridgeshire published its Housing Action Plan in August 2020 and addresses the following issues:

- Revisiting the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) / Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) to identify sites potentially suitable and available for housing development, including public sector land and brownfield land;
- Working with developers on the number of houses on site, including whether sites can be subdivided;
- Offering more pre-application discussions to ensure issues are addressed early;
- Consider the use of Planning Performance Agreements;
- Carrying out a new Call for Sites, as part of plan revision;
- Revising site allocation policies in the development plan, revising existing policies acting as a barrier to delivery, setting out new policies aimed at increasing delivery, or accelerating production of an emerging plan incorporating such policies;
- Reviewing the impact of any existing Article 4 directions for change of use from non-residential uses to residential use;
- Engaging regularly with key stakeholders to obtain up-to-date information on build out of current sites, identify any barriers, and discuss how these can be addressed;
- Establishing whether certain applications can be prioritised, conditions simplified, or their discharge phased on approved sites, and standardised conditions reviewed;
- Ensuring evidence on a particular site is informed by an understanding of viability;
- Considering compulsory purchase powers to unlock suitable housing sites;
- Using Brownfield Registers to grant permission in principle to previously developed land; and
- Encouraging the development of small sites and higher site densities.

Design Policies

3.10 The NPPF gives a new emphasis to design policies. The written ministerial statement announcing the launch of the revised Framework included 'Critically, progress must not be at the expense of quality or design. Houses must be right for communities. So, the planning reforms in the new Framework should result in homes that are locally led, well-designed, and of a consistent and high quality standard.' Effective engagement with local communities, the use of 'local design standards or style guides', and the refusal of permissions for developments of poor design are some

of the ways the revised NPPF aims to achieve this objective. Beautiful design and gentle densifications are also advocated in the 'Planning for the Future – White Paper'.

3.11 Paragraph 127 of NPPF sets out a list of criteria that planning policies and developments should address. The criteria seek to ensure that development is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, establishes and maintains a strong sense of place, optimises the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development. Additionally, NPPF states developments should create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. Planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing where this would address an identified need. Policies may also make use of the nationally described space standards, where the need for an internal space standard can be justified.

Local Green Spaces

3.12 The NPPF also states that Local Green Space designations through local and neighbourhood plans allow communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them (paragraph 99). The criteria for Local Green Space designation are set out at NPPF (paragraph 100) which states designations should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

PART 4 EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan must be in conformity with the adopted Development Plan. The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 contains the relevant development plan policies for Soham and Barway together with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan. The Plan does not include a specific list of strategic policies that the Neighbourhood Plans should consider. Therefore, it will be appropriate to consider the policies in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan as a whole. The Plan period is 2011 to 2031 and a Neighbourhood Plan would normally align its plan period with the end date of the Local Plan. However, the NPG may wish to consider the impact of extending the plan period beyond 2031.

4.2 The Development Plan comprises:

- East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan
- Fordham Neighbourhood Plan
- Sutton Neighbourhood Plan

- Witchford Neighbourhood Plan

4.3 The Local Plan is also supported by many 'Topic based' Supplementary Planning Documents. Supplementary Planning Documents are 'material considerations' in the planning decision making process:

- Contaminated Land
- County Wildlife Sites
- Developer Contributions
- Design Guide
- Renewable Energy (commercial scale)
- Shop Fronts Design Guide
- Soham Conservation Area Appraisal (2008)
- Community Led Development
- Cambridgeshire Flood and Water
- Custom and Self-Build Housing
- Natural Environment
- Climate Change

4.4 Whilst Neighbourhood Plan policies cannot conflict with the policies, they can provide more distinctiveness, definition or finer grain of detail by applying them to specific sites or relating them specifically to Soham and Barway.

Vision and Objectives

4.5 ECDC, in the 2015 Local Plan, state the policies for Soham were built upon a bottom up approach which produced a vision for Soham building on the [Soham Masterplan](#). The Masterplan's Vision seeks to reshape Soham in order to achieve a role for the town as a 21st Century Cambridgeshire Market town. The Masterplan informed the ECDC Local Plan which provides a Soham Vision, Objectives and a comprehensive and detailed set of policies defining the housing and employment allocations.

4.6 The ECDC Local Plan 2015 includes both a Vision and Objectives for Soham:

'Soham will be a vibrant 21st century market town, with a thriving town centre and good employment opportunities. Attractive new housing developments in the central belt of the town will help to increase footfall in the High Street, and support a revitalised town centre with a wide range of new and extended shops, cafes and other community facilities. The town's strategic location will be attractive to employers wishing to establish or expand on newly serviced employment sites, bringing forward new job opportunities. The town will be a highly desirable place to live and work, with its unique Commons setting, and good quality infrastructure and facilities - including a new train station, a modernised town hall and enhanced green network'

4.7 The Local Plan also lists 'Soham strategic objectives'

1. Improve the town centre, to provide a revitalised and vibrant hub with good shopping, leisure and community activities.
2. Expand the range of shopping and community facilities in Soham to match the growing population.
3. Focus housing growth in the central belt in order to support the town centre.
4. Provide high quality housing development which is easily accessible on foot or cycle to the town centre and key facilities.
5. Support job retention and creation, by retaining existing employment sites and facilitating new developments on the edge of the town.
6. Provide enhanced infrastructure and facilities to support growth, including local facilities of an appropriate scale to serve neighbourhoods.
7. Re-introduce a railway station for Soham.
8. Protect and enhance the unique green setting of Soham, including the Commons, and green network/links.
9. Protect and enhance the historic environment, particularly within the town centre

4.8 Since the adoption of the Local Plan, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has prepared 'A Market Town Plan for Soham'. The Plan was approved by ECDC's Finance & Assets Committee in June 2020.

4.9 The vision in the Combined Authority Report states:

"Soham will be a highly desirable place to live and work, with an improved cultural and leisure offer and good employment opportunities to enable people to live and work locally. The repurposed town centre and reopened station will make our town much more attractive to live in and visit."

4.10 The report goes on to include four major themes which are discussed in more detail in the thematic sections below:

1. A repurposed, resilient town centre
2. Opening up our town through better connectivity
3. The heart of Cambridgeshire's Agritech Industry
4. A new leisure and culture offer

4.11 The Local Plan provides a vision which builds upon the 2010 Masterplan and a list of detailed objectives. The more recent work by the Combined Authority provides a distinct and more focussed vision and list of themes. The visions are not necessarily in conflict and indeed are in most instances complementary. However, the Neighbourhood Plan will need to consider the visions, themes and objectives set out in the three documents and review and determine an appropriate Vision and objectives to take forward for the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan.

District Wide Housing Strategy

4.12 The Local Plan policies seek to focus development on or around the major settlements of Ely Soham and Littleport (Policy GROWTH 2). It states that wherever possible new housing will respond to local needs, be well designed, ensuring the distinctiveness and character of towns and villages. Policy GROWTH 1 of the 2015 Local plan makes provision for 11,500 dwellings, opportunities for 9,200 additional jobs and additional convenience and comparison retail floorspace.

4.13 The Local Plan allocates sites across the district to ensure that sufficient land is brought forward to meet the identified need for housing in the district to 2031. The Local Plan describes Soham as one of the three main settlements in the district which together comprise 45% of the district's population and where the majority of development will be focused.

4.14 Housing will be delivered through outstanding planning commitments, large potential sites within settlements (identified in Soham as Opportunity Areas), small windfall sites, rural exception sites, new allocations on the edge of settlement as identified in Policy Growth 4 and Part 2 of the Plan (Housing allocations on the Inset map) together with broad locations on the edge of key settlements. These Broad Locations are identified on Key Diagrams identified on page 32 of the Local Plan. The three broad locations for housing growth are defined by 'arrows' on the diagram and are located

- between The Shade and Broad Piece;
- between Northfield Road, St Felix Court and the bypass; and finally
- between Cherry Tree Lane and the A1123 Wicken Road.

Housing Requirements for Soham and Barway

4.15 East Cambridgeshire District Council are required to provide a housing figure for the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan if requested. Paragraph 66 of NPPF states the housing requirement figure for a neighbourhood plan should take into account the latest evidence of local housing need, the population of the neighbourhood plan area and the most recently available planning strategy of the local planning authority.

4.16 In setting an indicative housing requirement for a Neighbourhood Area, the District will have considered not only the Local Plan 2015, but other factors such as dwelling completions in the plan period, commitment from extant planning permissions and evidence of housing need, such as the government's Local Housing Need standard method and the need to deliver a supply of new homes.

4.17 The 2015 Local Plan estimates that between 2013 to 2031, 2,290 new homes will be brought forward in the town (see Table 3.2 of the Local Plan). This compares to an estimate of 4,043 in Ely and 1,449 in Littleport. In addition to setting targets for specific towns, the Local Plan identifies broad locations for growth (or 'Broad Areas for Housing') at Soham and Littleport, which the Local Plan says will provide a total of 1,800 dwellings over the plan period (2011-31). The Local Plan does not, however, specify how this 1,800 dwelling unit growth should be split between the two towns.

4.18 The Council has for some time (e.g. during the preparation of the now withdrawn Local Plan) assumed that the 1,800 dwellings would be split approximately between 600 additional dwellings at Soham and 1,200 additional dwellings at Littleport. This assumption is based on the likely

approximate quantity of growth that could come forward in the broad zones indicated as being 'Broad Locations for Growth'.

4.19 Therefore, using the assumptions above, the Local Plan's requirement for Soham for 2011-2031 is estimated to be (2,290 + 600).

4.20 Since 2011, Soham has seen a considerable amount of new development and new planning permissions. At 1st April 2020, ECDC's housing monitoring data shows that a total of 708 dwelling units have been completed in Soham. Current unimplemented planning permissions and defined housing allocations without planning permission total 1,628 dwellings units. Therefore, the total current supply at 1st April 2020 is 2,336 dwellings. Using the ECDC's assumptions, there is a potential net deficit against the Local Plan requirement of 554 dwellings.

4.21 The Broad Areas of Growth are outside the development envelope for Soham, are not identified as Housing Allocations and do not benefit from the same level of detailed policy provision that other housing sites in Soham have. The Local Plan Single Issue Review is considering whether to retain such Broad Areas or retain the Broad Areas with any updated guidance or explanation of them.

4.22 It is important to note that the Government consulted on proposed changes to the way in which the Housing Need Requirement is calculated and the impact that, if adopted, this would have upon the indicative housing requirement. The current Local Plan objectively assessed need for housing for East Cambridgeshire to 2031, set out in the Local Plan, is 575 dwellings per annum. The current standard methodology reports an annual housing requirement of 446 dwellings per annum for the final period of the plan to 2031 (as reported in the Local Plan Review consultation document). Using the Government's consultation version of the methodology, the requirement would increase to 597 dwellings per annum.

Housing Policy

4.23 Policy HOU1 requires development of 10 or more homes to have a mix of home sizes and Policy HOU2 requires an appropriate housing density, judged on a site by site basis. NPPF (para 61) supports policies that are more detailed and set out the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in planning policies. This can include affordable housing, families with children, older people, service families etc. As an example, the NP policies could set out the share of 1 or 2 bedroom homes, 3 bedroom homes 4 or more bedroom homes.

4.24 Policy HOU3: Affordable Housing Provision seeks a contribution of 30% affordable housing on sites which incorporate more than 10 dwellings in this part of the district. Affordable housing should normally be provided on the site and priority given to people in local housing need in accordance with the District's allocation policy. The proportion and type will be subject to negotiation and mix of terms of tenures and house sizes will be determined by local circumstances. This approach is reiterated in the Soham site allocations. From the evidence presented in Appendix 1, allocated sites would appear to be secured with a 30% affordable housing provision.

4.25 It is therefore surprising that more recent [Viability Assessments](#), completed by the District Council in April 2019, would suggest that viability on the Soham allocations is below the district average. The report concludes that a 20% headline Affordable Housing target for the towns of

Littleport and Soham (potentially subject to potential revision upwards with starter homes or similar included) would represent an appropriate scenario. It will be important for the Neighbourhood Plan to consider the provision of affordable housing secured through planning permissions, the results of the viability assessment and the impact it has upon the delivery of affordable housing alongside other policy requirements.

4.25 Policy GROWTH 6: Affordable housing outside development envelopes may be permitted where it is well related to the settlement, causes no harm to character of the area, is of a scale that is appropriate to its location, includes different types, tenures, and sizes, and is initiated by a legitimate local community group. An element of open market housing is acceptable where it is essential to enable delivery of the site for primarily affordable housing.

4.26 Policy HOU4 rehearses GROWTH 6 and supports affordable housing exceptions sites (rural exception sites) to meet identified local housing needs on small sites adjoining development frameworks. Policy HOU4 applies where the affordable housing need cannot be met on available sites within the framework or on allocated sites. Again, an element of open market housing is acceptable where it is essential to enable delivery of the site for primarily affordable housing.

Major Development Sites

4.27 The 2015 Local Plan allocates housing allocations and employment site.

- SOH 1 Land off Brook Street (22 hectares and approximately 400 dwellings)
- SOH 2 Land off Station Road (3.6 hectares and 90 dwellings, 0.5ha office / industrial)
- SOH 3 Eastern Gateway (33 hectares 600 dwellings, 0.5 ha office / industrial)
- SOH 4 land off Fordham Road (3.85 ha for up to 90 dwellings)
- SOH 5 Land south of Blackberry Lane (6.85 ha for up to 160 dwellings)
- SOH 6 Land north of Blackberry Lane (4.4 ha for up to 100 dwellings)
- SOH 7 Land adjacent Cemetery (4.8 ha for approx. 115 dwellings)
- SOH 8 Land east of The Shade (1.96 dwellings for 45 dwellings)
- SOH 9 Land east of The Shade (5 ha for B1/ B2/B8 and local convenience store)
- SOH 10 Land west of The Shade (2 ha for B1/ B2/B8)
- SOH 11 Land east of the A142 bypass (11 ha for B1/ B2/B8)
- SOH 12 Budgens Site (0.55 ha)
- SOH 13 Church Hall Site (0.4 ha)
- SOH 14 Cooperative Store (0.3 ha)
- SOH 15 Fountain Lane recreation ground and car park

4.28 The status of each allocation is detailed below:

- SOH 1 Land off Brook Street (No substantive consents)
- SOH 2 Land off Station Road (Consent for station complex)
- SOH 3 Eastern Gateway (Pending decisions)
- SOH 4 Land off Fordham Road (Under construction)
- SOH 5 Land south of Blackberry Lane (Under construction)
- SOH 6 Land north of Blackberry Lane (No consents)

- SOH 7 Land adjacent Cemetery (Full consent approved)
- SOH 8 Land east of The Shade (consent 16/00535/FUM expires 09/08/2018 for 88 dwellings)
- SOH 9 Land east of The Shade (Approval for mixed use development)
- SOH 10 Land west of The Shade (Application pending – decision 21st July 2021)
- SOH 11 Land east of the A142 bypass (No applications)
- SOH 12 Budgens Site (No applications)
- SOH 13 Church Hall Site (Completed and occupied)
- SOH 14 Cooperative Store (No applications)
- SOH 15 Fountain Lane recreation ground and car park (No applications)

4.29 Each of the Soham allocations includes a detailed list of criteria that should be addressed including affordable housing, site specific design and environment considerations and transport improvements including road, cycle, pedestrian provisions. A schedule of the status of planning applications, consents and S106 agreements on allocated sites in Soham and Barway is included in Appendix 1. Planning applications and consents not on allocated sites in Soham and Barway is included in Appendix 2. To reiterate, in addition to the allocations above, the Local Plan identifies three broad areas of housing growth which together with similar policy designations in Littleport are identified to accommodate 1,800 dwelling units.

Local Plan Policy for Barway

4.30 Barway has a distinct and separate policy approach to Soham in the 2015 Local Plan. Barway is a small rural village and has no significant facilities but has experienced ‘infill’ growth since 2005. A development envelope has been drawn around Barway to define its built up area where further infill development may be permitted. Two housing sites are allocated at The Barn, Randall Farm (0.3 ha for approx. 5 dwellings) and land east of 5 Barway Road (0.3 ha for approx. 5 dwellings). There have been a number of planning applications for both these areas, and these have all been passed although no affordable housing has been included. Most were for large single houses or pairs of houses.

4.31 Policy GROWTH 2 states that limited development will take place in those villages with an identified development envelope (including Barway) provided there is no impact upon the character and appearance of the area. Infill sites within the development envelope will be permitted. Outside development envelopes, development will be strictly controlled. Exceptionally development may be permitted such as Affordable Housing Exception Schemes, Rural Workers dwellings, residential care homes, small scale employment development, equestrian, tourism and leisure facilities. A full list is provided in the policy.

4.32 Each settlement identified in the Local Plan has a development envelope which defines the built up part of the village or town. The Neighbourhood Plan provides an opportunity to review the development envelope boundaries of both Soham and Barway to align with any planning permissions for development or allocations made since the 2015 Local Plan and which are part of the built up area of the settlement. Indeed, there may be anomalies which the NPG would wish to address.

Employment and Retail

4.33 National Policy states that plans should create the conditions in which business can invest, expand and adapt. Policies should set out a clear economic vision, set criteria for local and inward investment, address potential barriers and be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan. The Local Plan makes provision for 9,200 new jobs across the district. As detailed above employment allocations and mixed use developments are identified in Soham. The purpose of the allocations is to provide more local employment opportunities, reduce out commuting, increase the jobs density ratios and create more balanced communities with better levels of self-containment.

4.34 Policy EMP1 seeks to retain existing employment sites (using classes B1, B2 and B8) unless clear and robust evidence demonstrates that the site is no longer viable or redevelopment would offer significant environmental and community benefit.

4.35 Policy EMP2 supports extension to existing businesses in the countryside; Policy EMP3 supports new small scale businesses closely related to the built up framework of the settlement where there is a lack of suitable buildings and sites. Policy EMP4 supports re use of existing buildings in the countryside where it is a permanent and substantial construction or where its replacement results in a more acceptable and sustainable development.

4.36 Policy EMP5 and EMP6 supports proposal for and protection of the horse racing or equine industry subject to safeguarding criteria. Policy EMP7 supports tourist facilities and visitor attractions and EMP8 supports proposals for new or extended caravan, caravan lodge, camping sites, marinas subject to the need being justified, well related to an existing settlement and safeguarding conditions. Holiday occupancy conditions will be placed on new un-serviced holiday accommodation (Policy EMP9).

4.37 The 2010 Masterplan's vision includes strengthening the role of Soham by enhancing the range of niche shops and exploiting the opportunities for retail expansion in the town centre.

4.38 The Local Plan seeks to strengthen the retail offer in Soham within the identified Town Centre Boundary and identifies that a net increase in convenience retail floorspace should be in Soham (1,666m²) with no net increase in comparison (non-food) floorspace. The Town Centre boundary and opportunity areas are shown on the Proposals Map. Of course, these figures for future demand predate the acceleration of the trend in on line shopping and changes in shopping behaviours due to Covid. Indeed, the policies appear to have had limited impact. ECDC monitoring reports a steady decline in town centre uses including A1 Retail and B1 offices. Both Banks in the town have been lost. For Soham, the Monitoring Report 2020 notes small developments in Churchgate and the High Street with changes of retail to A2 offices, restaurants and cafes and residential.

4.39 The Combined Authority Plan states that the town centre will move from being overly reliant on shopping to a more holistic space, with social interaction and green space built in. This includes building on 'Street Wi-Fi' and preparing for 5G. Housing and employment growth is expected to increase footfall to the High Street. The report highlights the need to monitor Soham's economy,

provide small scale financial support to help businesses adapt and reskilling. It also identifies the opportunities that a greater number of home workers will bring, growing the market for cafes, co working space etc. It promotes a more detailed town centre study to help Soham 'bounce back'. Initiatives suggested include making the town greener and pedestrian friendly with good access on cycle and by bicycle. To thrive, it is suggested Soham needs a Civic space possibly at the Market Square.

4.40 Such initiatives and applications for retail development will currently be assessed against criteria based policy in COM 1 – 'Location of Retail And Town Centre Uses' which seeks to ensure that the scale and type of development is directly related to the role and function of the locality. Policy COM 2 identifies the town centre boundary and supports planning proposals from A1 to other uses subject to a series of safeguarding conditions including 3 opportunity areas (SOH 7, 8 and 9).

4.41 The Local Plan objectives for Soham are clear that its retail offer and its vitality and viability are critical to the success of the local economy. The Local Plan recognises that Soham's centre is smaller and more vulnerable and has experienced decline in recent years. For this reason, the supporting justification states that proposals involving additional net retail floorspace of 280m² will require a Retail Impact Assessment. The initial consultation highlights the desire for more shops and issues relating to the type of uses in the High Street. The Neighbourhood Plan could review the policies to ensure that they are fit for purpose in the light of structural changes to the retail economy and to consider any of the initiatives considered appropriate in the Combined Authority work.

4.42 Any policy direction will need to take on board changes to town centre use classes order which came into force on 1st September, 2020. The provisions allow far greater flexibility to change uses within town centres without the need to obtain planning permission. Indeed, there are a number of retail and office premises that have been or are being converted to residential use. The change to the Use Classes Order will make some retail and local services and facilities planning policies, such as COM1 and COM2 ineffective, as well as restricting the ability of the East Cambridgeshire District Council to control the mix of uses through planning controls.

4.43 To be clear, the changes create three new uses classes: Class E (Commercial, business and service), Class F.1 (Learning and non-residential institutions) and F.2 (Local community). The changes combine shops (A1), financial/professional services (A2), cafés/restaurants (A3), indoor sports/fitness (D2 part), medical health facilities (D1 part), creche/nurseries and office/business uses (B1) into a new single Use Class E. Change between uses within Class E is not development and therefore no planning permission is required. Additionally, new permitted development rights allow the conversion of Class E to residential under the prior notifications' procedure. Again, this limits the control of town centre uses that ECDC can exert. The NP will need to be cognisant of the potential change of town centre uses, and the impact that might have upon the High Street offer and how the Neighbourhood Plan might respond to the dynamic and changing environment in its town centre.

4.44 The Plan prepared by the Combined Authority identifies Soham as the centre of Agritech in the East of England situated between the research centre in Cambridge and the food processing factories of north Cambridgeshire. It considers the NIAB Hasse Fen facility to be the basis for an 'innovation ecosystem' with companies to be based in the towns grow on space. Established a few

years ago, the facility has expanded rapidly, expanding premises to meet demand. The report also highlights the importance of Barcham Trees and G's Group. The report recognises that the site is away from the town centre but the goal is for companies to form a dense business network situated in and around the town. The Neighbourhood Plan could consider how it wishes to respond spatially to this new initiative.

Local Services and Facilities

4.45 NPPF states planning policies should aim to achieve, healthy inclusive and safe places and provide the social recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs. It is important that sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of the existing and new communities (para 94). The Local Plan recognises that Soham needs an appropriate level of services and facilities to ensure quality of life and prevent unnecessary travel.

4.46 Policy COM3 seeks to protect village services and facilities and sets out criteria on which those assessments will be based including marketing of the premises for at least 12 months. New community facilities should be located within the settlement (Policy COM4). However, see note above on new Use Class E and the impact this will have on planning control between uses.

4.47 GROWTH 3 supports appropriate physical, social and green infrastructure to support new development. Development will be expected to contribute to the Community Infrastructure Levy or secured through S106 agreements where this is not secured through CIL. A list of infrastructure requirements is detailed in GROWTH 3.

4.48 The Local Plan identifies the following infrastructure requirements in policy:

- The Wastewater Treatment Works at Soham need to be expanded to enable further development (planned for March 2014)
- New Pre School facilities (land at Eastern Gateway)
- New Early Year (nursery facilities)
- 1 New Primary School in Soham (land at Eastern Gateway)
- Expanded Primary Healthcare provision (land at Eastern Gateway)
- Development of Soham Railway station
- Expansion of Soham Village College to support growth planned at Burwell
- Improvements to existing route to Soham and A142 junction to support growth at Fordham
- Cycle route between Wicken and Soham via Downfields / Drury Lane

4.49 Additionally, a table on 285 of the Local Plan, as part of the Soham Chapter, lists key future infrastructure and service requirements detailed by residents in Soham.

4.50 Residents in Barway has also identified several infrastructure and community improvements including improvements to pedestrian / cycle routes, traffic calming / highway improvements and a new play area and improvements to open space. The Neighbourhood Plan can explore how it might facilitate any of these interventions.

4.51 The Combined Authority Report identifies a key gap in the leisure and cultural offer in the town. The report suggests a site assessment study is needed to consider possible options for a leisure facility complementing the study on outdoor sporting facilities being taken forward by the District Council. Additionally, the report promotes Spencer Mill as a catalyst for a wider cultural offer. It suggests that the network of Commons provides opportunities for informal leisure activities developing the town into a hub for walkers, cyclists and birdwatchers.

4.52 The Neighbourhood Plan provides the opportunity to review the list of infrastructure requirements and whether the Neighbourhood Plan might address the spatial implications of that requirement. Considerations are likely to include education, green infrastructure, leisure, open space, health facilities, transport and other infrastructure providing a more distinctive and clear policy layer for Soham and Barway. It will be important to work alongside ECDC's outdoor facilities study.

4.53 ECDC Community Infrastructure Levy Schedule came into force on 1st February 2013 (updated January 2021). The rates will be levied in £ per m² of net additional floor space and then an indexation rate applied on the commencement of the development.

4.54 Soham has a Water Treatment Works Safeguarding Area where an odour assessment is required for development proposals within the safeguarding area. Additionally, parts of Soham are also included in a mineral safeguarding area. These areas can be viewed on the Local Plan Inset Map 8.35.

4.55 The initial Neighbourhood Plan consultation includes several aspirations to improve local facilities for different members of the community including Sports Facilities, medical provision and a central meeting point such as a Plaza or Square. The NP could usefully review this list and assess whether the existing Local Plan policies appropriately address these priorities, whether the existing planning consents or CIL will address the intervention as stated and additionally, where the Neighbourhood Plan can support the implementation of a future intervention.

Transport

4.56 National policies encourage transport issues to be considered at the earliest stages of plan making so that the impacts of development on the transport network can be addressed, opportunities are realised including to promote walking, cycling and public transport and patterns of movement are integral to the design of schemes.

4.57 Local Plan Policy COM7 'Transport Impact' seeks to promote sustainable travel and Policy COM8 – Parking seeks to provide adequate car parking provision. Parking is an issue within the town given the location, quality and scale of existing provision. The Neighbourhood Plan may wish to consider more detailed policies on car parking or parking design.

4.58 The Combined Authority Plan highlights the opportunities the new rail station presents to make the town more attractive to live and visit. It describes the opening of the station in 2022 as a 'Game Changer'. Currently the opening of the rail station and the potential for redevelopment at Station Road in line with community aspirations is limited to allocation SOH 2 where a master plan is

to be prepared for the whole area. The Neighbourhood Plan may wish to consider whether to consider the opportunities presented by the Station opening including opportunities for business growth. It may be appropriate to add a distinctive layer of detail to the policy securing more commercial development or indeed present wider opportunities as detailed in the Combined Authority Report with links to cultural assets (Spencer Mill) and environmental Assets (Soham Lode, heritage path, local fenland). Additionally, consideration could be given to a transport assessment given the impact of new developments and the new station.

4.59 The Soham allocations include pedestrian and cycle links across the sites, between housing and planned uses. However, the permeability and coherence of the wider networks is currently missing from the development plan. There are opportunities in the NP to identify new routes or to improve or safeguard existing routes.

Protecting Village Character

4.60 NPPF gives a new emphasis to design policies and a new Planning Practice Guidance Note on Design was published on 1st October 2019. The ministerial statement announcing the launch of the revised NPPF included 'Critically, progress must not be at the expense of quality or design. Houses must be right for communities. So, the planning reforms in the new Framework should result in homes that are locally led, well-designed, and of a consistent and high quality standard.'

4.61 Effective engagement with local communities, the use of 'local design standards or style guides', and the refusal of permissions for developments of poor design are some of the ways the revised NPPF aims to achieve this objective.

4.62 East Cambridgeshire has a Design Guide prepared and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2012 which sets out design principles and parameters to be used in determining planning applications. The guidance is district wide and does not include any specific examples or principles for Soham.

4.63 The SPD is a material consideration in the decision making process. Importantly, the starting point for decision making is the Development Plan and therefore there may be opportunities to consider whether any of the provisions in the SPDs should carry more weight through the adoption of the considerations as policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

4.64 Policy ENV1 provides a criterion based policy seeking to ensure development is sympathetic to and respect the distinctive character areas set out in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines.

4.65 Policy ENV2 Design seeks to secure high quality development, enhancing and complementing local distinctiveness and public amenity by relating well to existing features and introducing appropriate new designs. It states that the Council will prepare and adopt development frameworks to guide the development of key sites including design principles, infrastructure delivery and phasing. Design codes will be required between outline and reserved matters application stages. The policy includes a list of criteria against which a development proposal will be assessed. The policy does not include any distinctive policies which distinguishes between one place from another.

4.66 ENV3 sets out the design standards for shop fronts and advertisements seeking to retain traditional shop fronts. The Supplementary Planning Guidance on Shop Fronts (2010) provides further advice on design principles and other key elements of shop front design.

4.67 The Custom and Self- Build Housing SPD provides guidance to large scale developers who are obliged to meet the Local Plan policy to provide self-build plots in a development consisting of 100 dwellings or more. The SPD also provides useful advice for individuals, groups or Community Land Trusts (or similar) that may be interested in providing and developing self-build plots.

4.68 ENV11 Conservation Areas, ENV12 Listed Buildings, ENV13 Local Register of Buildings and Structures; ENV14 Sites of Archaeological Interest and Scheduled Ancient Monument (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Roman site near Old Fordey Farm Barway) seek to sustain and enhance Heritage Assets including the special character and distinctiveness of the district's historic environment and supports new quality environments with a strong sense of place.

4.69 It is also important to note that Soham has several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Wet Horse Fen Stow Cum Quy, Fen Ten Wood Upware, Bridge Pit North, North Pit and South Pit, Upware).

4.70 Soham has the benefit of a Conservation Area Appraisal Supplementary Planning Document which sets out a detailed description of the Conservation Area and some of its attributes. It sets out several enhancement opportunities including reinstating fenestration pattern and materials, improving the Red Lion Square, use of traditional shop fronts, encouragement of residential use above retail frontages, treatment of soft landscaping and reinstatement of building lines, front boundary walls and railings. The Neighbourhood Plan may consider whether there are distinctive elements of the Conservation Area Appraisal or indeed ECDC's Supplementary Planning Document on Shop Fronts which could be incorporated into a Design Code or policy to add a layer of specificity and distinctiveness.

4.71 Guidance has been published in November 2019 to show local communities how heritage can be incorporated into Neighbourhood Plans. The National Trust's Guide to Heritage in Neighbourhood Plans includes guidance on collecting evidence, tools for assessing design character and sustainability.

4.72 Policy EN7 Bio – diversity and Geology states that development which harms County Wildlife Sites (East Fen Common and The Wash, Mere Side grasslands, Qua Fen Common, Soham Cemetery, Broadpiece and River Great Ouse, Soham Tunnel Drove, Black Wing Drains, River lark and associated habitat) and Local Nature Reserves will not be permitted unless the benefits of the development outweigh the potential harm to nature conservation interest. National policy seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity and plans should identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife rich habitats and wider ecological networks, wildlife corridors and 'stepping stones' that connect them. If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from the development cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated for then permission should be refused. Development of irreplaceable habitats should be refused. The neighbourhood Plan might like to consider how it can add a layer of distinctiveness to this policy approach.

4.73 ENV8 - Flood Risk states that the sequential and exception tests will be strictly applied and ENV9 Pollution sets out the criteria against which developments with potential pollution,

contamination and waste implications will be considered. The Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document adopted in November 2016, supports the implementation of flood risk and water related policies as part of new development proposals including the sequential test and where appropriate the exceptions test. It also sets out guidance on managing flood risk within the planning process and how to manage and mitigate risks including SuDS.

4.74 Flood risk is an important issue due to the flat and low lying topography. The Council has updated its Water Cycle Study to assess the constraints and requirements that will arise from growth on water infrastructure. The overall objective of the [Water Cycle Study](#) November 2017 is to understand the environmental and physical demands of the development and identify opportunities for more sustainable planning and improvements that may be required so that proposals don't exceed the existing water cycle capacity. The policies in the now withdrawn Local Plan sought to ensure proposals for new development appropriately manage flood risk and protect the water environment. The Neighbourhood Plan may wish to consider a similar approach.

4.75 Through the initial stages of the Neighbourhood Plan a desire was expressed to improve design, protect heritage and the built environment and provide a more detailed design code which secures more and better off road parking, appropriate inside and outside space and positive design criteria. There would appear to be an opportunity for the Neighbourhood Plan to provide an up to date and specific design code that is distinctive and specifically relevant to support and enhance the characteristics of Soham.

Green Infrastructure

4.76 Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy includes Soham Town Corridors. Soham has many historic 'green lanes' used to provide key routes from the town to the surrounding countryside and to its Commons and Meres. Common Land is identified on the Local Plan proposals Maps. Additionally, the Green Infrastructure Strategy identified opportunities for

- Biodiversity: continuing Higher Level Stewardship on Soham Commons to provide habitat opportunities and restoration for a wide range of species.
- Climate Change: protection of existing open spaces to reduce habitat loss as a result of climate change and developing new public realm locations that provide attractive and functional places that respond to climate change.
- Green Infrastructure Gateways: utilising the Public Rights of Way network to facilitate movement from Soham into the wider countryside and in particular links with Wicken Fen.
- Heritage: enhancing the heritage of the town and working with residents to develop and interpret better open spaces within its historic centre.
- Landscape: the landscape character of Soham is typically Fenland in nature with a flat and continuous vista of the countryside and the town. The town's three registered Commons also provide the town with rural nature close to the town's centre.
- Publicly Accessible Open Space: improving the access and provision of public spaces in central Soham and matching this with new locations in the proposed eastern expansions of the town.

- Rights of Way: providing the infrastructure across the town and to neighbouring villages for people to walk, ride and cycle to the places they wish to go

4.77 Policy COM5 states Strategic Green Infrastructure will be protected and the Council will support new and improve strategic green infrastructure which is consistent with the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. Additionally, Policy SOH16: Green Lanes and Commons seeks to ensure that development schemes which contain or adjoin green land and public rights of way should respect their integrity and not adversely affect their appearance and character. Schemes should also demonstrate how routes will be improved and enhanced. The wildlife, landscape and recreational quality of the Commons should be protected and enhanced. A report [Soham Commons Recreational and Biodiversity Enhancement Study](#) commissioned by the Wildlife Trust identifies interventions to secure the long term future of Soham's Commons in terms of their nature conservation and landscape interests.

4.78 The NPPF (para 99) states that Local Green Space designations through local and neighbourhood plans allow communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them (paragraph 99). The criteria for Local Green Space designation are set out at NPPF (paragraph 100) which states designations should only be used where the green space is:

- a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

4.79 The Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan can consider taking up the opportunity offered in the framework to identify and designate Local Green Spaces in accordance with paragraphs 99-101. Such spaces can only be designated at the time the neighbourhood plan is being prepared and development within them will be treated in the same way as development within the Green Belt – i.e., inappropriate development will only be permitted where there are very special circumstances.

4.80 Alongside, this designation, the Neighbourhood Plan can consider policy considerations which add a layer of distinctiveness including specifically identifying Green Lanes, Important Countryside Frontages or Public Village Amenity Areas including considerations in the Soham Commons Study.

Community Led Initiatives

4.81 The District Council recognises the importance of community-led initiatives, and has a Supplementary Planning Document which supports 'community-led development' on the edge of villages. This may include schemes involving affordable housing, small business units, renewable energy generation and other appropriate uses. Policy GROWTH 6 states that the non-housing elements of schemes will be assessed against other relevant Local Plan policies. However, the policy allows community led affordable housing schemes to be developed as 'exception sites' on the edge of villages or market towns outside the development envelopes where open market housing would not be normally permitted (though a mixed affordable housing / market housing scheme might be

possible). Soham has the 'Thrift CLT', managed for the community by a board of local people. This CLT has already delivered new development with 6 one bedroom flats and two shared ownership houses. These are provided at 80% of local rents and will remain the property of the community in perpetuity. There may be further opportunity for the Neighbourhood Plan to support the CLT in delivering further development that gives people with local connections priority.

Climate Change

4.82 A Local Plan Strategic objective is to reduce the environmental impact of development and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change by reducing pollution and waste, maximising water and energy efficiency, dealing with flood risk and surface water management, and promoting the use of renewable energy sources and sustainable construction methods.

4.83 The impact of development should aim to be reduced or zero carbon and developments of 5 or more homes are required to achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 or its replacement. The Code for Sustainable Homes was withdrawn by the government in 2015. However, National Planning Practice Guidance is broadly consistent with Policy ENV4. All non-domestic developments over 1000m² are expected to meet BREEAM Very Good Standard (Policy ENV4), carbon off setting (Policy ENV5 although the provisions have not been progressed), supporting renewable energy schemes subject to safeguarding criteria (ENV6).

4.84 In response to the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency (adopted June 2020) it has published a Climate Change SPD building upon the 'Environment and Climate Change' section of the Local Plan. It also responds to more recent National Planning Policy and guidance which stresses the need for the planning system to support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and resilience and encourage the reuse of existing resources.

4.85 The SPD sets out how the applicant can demonstrate that Policy ENV4 of the Local Plan can be met by submitting a sustainability statement. In part CC1, developers are encouraged to incorporate renewable / low energy generation provision on site or connect into an existing nearby renewable, low or zero carbon energy generation network where they exist. Developers of large scale residential or non residential developments over 1,000 m sq are asked to consider the inclusion of Combined Heat and Power generation or a network connection to an existing CHP facility. In part CC2 applicants are encouraged to look at opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of the building, improve the EPC rating. Part CC3 encourages developers to demonstrate how the design minimises overheating and reduces demand on air conditioning systems and potentially include green roof or walls. Applicants are also encouraged to design proposals to be adaptable to future social, economic, technological and environmental requirements. Part CC4 resists development if it would significantly harm existing or approved renewable or low carbon energy generation facilities.

4.86 The SPD is a material consideration in the decision making process. Importantly, the starting point for decision making is the Development Plan and therefore there may be opportunities to consider whether any of the provisions in the SPDs should carry more weight through the adoption of the considerations as policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. This would in part address some of the

key issues raised through the initial Neighbourhood Plan consultation seeking to address climate change, provide possibilities for local green energy production and electric charging points.

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PART 5 NEW ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Review

5.1 ECDC is undertaking a Single Issue Review of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015. The Council is currently consulting on a very limited, partial update. One area has been identified as being in need of update, namely Policy GROWTH1 which uses an out of date housing requirement figure. A consultation was undertaken to 7th May 2021 and the supporting document can be found [here](#).

5.2 The Single Issue Review Stage 1 consultation document is the first formal stage of the review process. Its main purpose is to seek views as to whether the right issues are covered and that all suitable options for accommodating change are considered. The purpose of the review is to partially replace a very small part of the Local Plan. The main issues being considered are Policy Growth 1 – the housing requirement in the district in line with the national standard method, to retain the plan period of 2011 to 2031, to not identify any new housing allocations but to consider whether it is necessary to retain the Broad Areas for housing which are currently Littleport and Soham. The initial view of ECDC is that the housing requirement figure for the district will reduce from 11,600 in the period 2011 to 2031 to approximately 8,922. This will be split into two elements: 2011 to 2021 and 2021 to 2031.

5.3 The next formal public consultation on the preferred options for the Local Plan will be summer / Autumn 2021 with submission for examination anticipated in November 2022 within the project plan timetable for the Neighbourhood Plan. For this reason, it will be important for the NPG to ensure that it critically reviews and keeps abreast of the consultation documents, the ECDC response and the consequent impact that it might have upon the NP policies.

Changes to the Planning System and Government White Paper: Planning for the Future

5.4 In 2020, two consultations were launched by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

5.5 The first, “Changes to the Current Planning System - consultation to planning policy and regulations”, can be found [here](#).

5.6 The 4 main proposals are:

- changes to the standard method for assessing local housing need
- securing First Homes through developer contributions in the short term until the transition to a new system
- supporting small and medium-sized builders by temporarily lifting the small sites threshold below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing
- extending the current Permission in Principle to major development

5.7 The second is the Planning White Paper. This perhaps received more attention in the press and will require primary legislation and therefore it is more about a longer view of planning.

5.8 The White Paper proposes significant changes to the current planning system with a shift to zoning. This includes a much stronger emphasis on community involvement at the plan making stage (Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan) and considerably less at the planning application stage. It is not clear from the white paper government intentions for Neighbourhood Plans. There is certainly plenty of support for Neighbourhood Plans and they remain part of the bigger picture. Locality have published an interim comment on the changes ahead of a full response. This can be found [here](#).

Changes to Use Classes Order and Permitted Development Rights

5.9 Finally, as discussed, there have also been changes already introduced to the Use Classes Order which took effect on 1st September 2010. A New E Class Use Class permits change of use between a wider range of different uses that would normally require planning permission. This is explored in the Retail and Employment Sections of this document.

5.10 It is anticipated that a revised National Planning Policy Framework will be published and the Neighbourhood Plan Group will need to ensure that it keeps live to and reviews the changes and the impact it has upon the vision, objectives and policies.

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PART 6 KEY POLICY ISSUES FOR THE WORKSHOP

6.1 The Local Plan and the Supplementary Planning Guidance documents provides a district wide approach to several spatial policy areas. A Neighbourhood Plan could add a further, more distinctive and locally appropriate layer and provide policy advice to positively influence and guide new development. In addition, a broad range of issues will emerge through early consultations for the Neighbourhood Plan to consider. The policy context raises several issues that the Neighbourhood Plan could consider:

- Strategy
 1. Review the vision and objectives
 2. The end date of the Local Plan – 2031 or beyond
 3. Approach to Broad Areas of Housing Growth
 4. Employment provision – opportunities e.g. Hasse Fen Agri Tech Hub
 5. Accelerating unimplemented allocations
- Housing
 1. The detailed design, mix, tenure of new development
 2. Meeting specific demand and delivery of affordable housing
 3. Implementation and viability of housing and mixed use allocations
 4. Defining allocation criteria
- Design
 1. Design code providing a detailed and Soham distinctive policy approach building upon the design SPD
 2. Secure appropriate and demonstrated Technical standards
 3. Secure National Space Standards
 4. Design of Parking sites and Parking Standards
- Soham Natural and Historic Character
 1. Include in Policy (rather than SPD) retention of the village’s natural, historic and important design characteristics and style particularly those that should be included in new developments
 2. Identify, protect and enhance the best of what you have by identifying any further positive planning designations and safeguarding policies such as Important Countryside Frontage, public open space, local green spaces or other amenity areas
 3. Identify, protect and enhance areas of wildlife, ecology, bio-diversity, local green spaces and commons, green corridors and the permeability between those spaces
 4. Local response to climate change building upon the Climate Change SPD
 5. Address issues of Flood Risk

- Settlement Services
 1. Identify and safeguard the health and vitality of the town centre including retail and service offer as far as possible within the new Use Classes Order – Class E
 2. Fill gaps in existing service offer including a market
 3. Update policy for Opportunity areas
 4. Creating a sense of place and focus – a Civic Space
 5. Maximise the potential of leisure, cultural and community facilities
 6. Define the type and location of business development needs, opportunities to support employment locally including home working

- Infrastructure
 1. Positive response to ‘connection’ related issues to rail, cycle and pedestrian
 2. Identify more precisely the location, type, design and intervention of new infrastructure services and community facilities to meet the demand for the parish
 3. Identify spatial requirements for community aspirations
 4. Safeguard, protect and enhance public rights of way

Natalie Blaken
Nupremis Cambridge Limited
July 2021

Appendix 1 – Status of Local Plan 2015 Allocated sites in Soham

SOH 1: Housing allocation, land off Brook Street

Approximately 22 hectares of land is allocated for residential development for up to approximately 400 dwellings. There are no substantive planning applications on this site although to note a number of other applications for residential development.

19/01542/FUL Proposed residential development of **one bungalow** on land to rear of 19 Brook Street . Approved 22/4/2020.

20/01438/FUL submitted 7/12/2020 for residential development of **four detached bungalows**, garaging, parking, access road & associated site works on land North of 19 Brook Street . Decision pending.

It is anticipated that further applications for a small area to the south of the allocated land are due to be submitted shortly.

SOH 2: Housing-led / mixed use allocation, land off Station Road

Approximately 3.6 hectares of land is allocated for a housing-led/mixed use development off Station Road. Within the site, provision will be made for up to approximately 90 dwellings, a station building, parking and associated facilities (on about 0.6 ha), and a minimum of 0.5 hectares of office/industrial development.

20/00561 - This planning application is for the **station complex** only and does not make reference to housing or office/industrial development. This plan proposed the re- introduction of Soham Station which incorporates a new platform to accommodate 80.7m long trains on the east side of the track, pedestrian footbridge, platform shelter, car park for 50 cars including 5 accessible spaces and approach road, 2 ticket vending machines, electric distribution cabinet, water pump cabinet, substation, pick up and drop off area, bicycle parking (for 30 bikes), motorbike parking, pedestrian footpaths and a surface water drainage system with attenuation tank. Approved on 26/6/2020

The developer must ensure that removal of any vegetation is carried out when no birds are nesting and other environmental restraints are adhered to.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is providing an £18.6m funding package for Network Rail to deliver the new railway station for the community. The first phase of the station is due to open in late 2021.

A second phase is promised once the rail line has been duelled when a second platform and lifts to assist in crossing the line will be installed. No further Section 106 or CIL appear to apply to this development.

SOH 3: Housing-led / mixed use allocation, Eastern Gateway area

Approximately 33 hectares of land is allocated for a housing-led/mixed use development in the Eastern Gateway area.

Within the site, provision will be made for:

- Up to approximately 600 dwellings
- Approximately 0.5 hectares for B1/B2 employment uses in small industrial or starter units/offices, providing 2000-2500m² of employment space
- A small local shop serving top-up needs
- Approximately 0.4 hectares for the extension of the Staploe Medical Centre
- Approximately 1.1 hectares for an extension of the Weatheralls Primary School site
- Approximately 3.6 hectares of allotment land
- Approximately 8 hectares of public open space and Commons land
- Approximately 3 hectares for the provision of a new Garden Centre, or employment uses (B1/B2/B8)

A planning application was submitted in early 2019 but has been withdrawn with no documents available to consult.

On 21/11/2019 a hybrid planning application was received. It was for a hybrid planning application for residential led mixed use development for approximately **540 dwellings** at Soham Eastern Gateway site comprising; 1) Application for full planning permission for the erection of 128 dwellings, construction of **new roundabout** and main spine road from A142, open space and landscaping, drainage attenuation, associated highways and utility services, and footpath diversions; and 2) Application for outline planning permission to demolish the existing medical centre and for the erection of up to 412 dwellings, vehicular access on to Brewhouse lane, a new mixed use hub (Class A1/A2/A3/A5/B1/D1 and C3 uses), **land for a new and enlarged medical centre** (Class D1), associated open space and landscaping, highways and infrastructure works. All matters reserved with the exception of access.

This is a substantially different from that indicated in the allocation. The area for development is considerably smaller and consequently the number of houses is much fewer (600>450) a smaller area for the new medical centre and the shop/commercial area, no allotments and no garden centre. Since this application was submitted there have been a number of iterations to address comments and concerns. A further application is awaited. Likely issues are access to this site from the town due to the very restricted access for vehicles and access to the new medical centre.

SOH 4: Housing allocation, land off Fordham Road

Approximately 3.85 hectares is allocated for residential development for up to 90 dwellings.

18/00059 – consent for 78 residential dwellings with new public open space. Affordable housing provision for 16 units for rent and 7 for shared ownership (29% affordable housing). Approved 24/2/2020.

Work is in progress.

Intervention	S106 Contribution
Affordable Housing	29%
Early Years contribution	£331,094
Primary School Education Contribution – St Andrews	£121,982
Secondary School Contribution	£262,265
Transport	£74,160
Commons	£8,000
Library contribution – Soham Library	£8,424
Household and Waste Bins	£43 per dwelling

SOH 5: Housing allocation, land south of Blackberry Lane

Approximately 6.85 hectares is allocated for residential development for up to 160 dwellings

Hybrid Planning Application - Full Application for the erection of **160 dwellings** and associated access, parking and open space; Outline Application for **8 Self-Build Dwellings**. Refused 13/8.2018 because it is considered to be an overdevelopment of the site that does not respond positively to the constraints (flood risk, green lanes and the noise of the A142) on the site. In addition the proposal fails to provide a high quality layout with the design having the appearance of being cramped in between the different constraints of the site and for this reason will not form a high quality place for people to live.

An appeal was allowed at appeal.

19/01520 - 6.85 ha residential development up to **160 dwellings with 30% affordable housing** (shared between rental properties 70% and 30% shared ownership properties). The developer must also provide open space, landscaped noise barrier, living willow fence, landscape buffer, SUDS, and SUDS management schemes to manage these items. Approved May 2020.

Work on site has commenced.

Intervention	S106 Contribution
Affordable Housing	30%
Transport – Improvements to A142 Newmarket Road	£1,000 per dwelling
Library contribution – Soham Library	£106 per dwelling
Household and Waste Bins – waste management systems	

SOH 6: Housing allocation, land north of Blackberry Lane

Approximately 4.4 hectares is allocated for residential development for up to 100 dwellings. No plans submitted yet.

SOH 7: Housing allocation, land adjacent to the cemetery

4.8 hectares of land is allocated for residential development for approximately 115 dwellings.

15/01491 - Hybrid Planning Application comprising Full Application for the Erection of **120 Residential Dwellings** and Associated Access, Parking and Open Space; Outline Application for the Erection of **6 Self-Build Dwellings**. Application approved on 25/01/2017

Section 106 clauses state that 26 affordable rental dwellings and 12 shared ownership affordable dwellings are to be provided (31%). Public open space will be provided together with a sum of money for its upkeep. As there is insufficient open space for the size of the development an additional sum of £18081.36 will be payable in lieu of this shortfall. £5160 payable for provision of wheelie bins to the properties. In addition, prior to 80% of the occupation of the properties 0.8ha of land will be transferred to the local council (Soham Town Council) at a charge of £1 for use as an extension to the cemetery together with all rights and easements in perpetuity.

Intervention	S106 Contribution
Affordable Housing	31%
Household and Waste Bins	£5,160
Public Open Space Contribution	£18,081
Transfer of 0.8ha of land for use as cemetery	£1

SOH 8: Housing allocation, land east of The Shade

1.96 hectares of land is allocated for residential development for approximately 45 dwellings.

An application for development on this site in conjunction with part of the SOH9 was received for erection of a supermarket with carparking. This was refused.

Additionally, planning permission was granted for 88 dwellings, garages, parking, roads and associated site works on 9th August 2018. This consent expires on 9th August 2021.

SOH9: Employment/mixed use allocation, land east of The Shade

Approximately 5 hectares of land is allocated for employment-led development for B1/B2/B8 uses on land adjacent to Northfield Business Park. The part of this allocation adjacent to The Shade has a planning application for a residential home, children's nursery and housing 19/00771. The remaining land in the allocation remains available for development.

19/00771 - Application for development of the land to provide a new **70-bedroom care home** (Use Class C2), a **children's nursery** (Use Class D1), **18 dwellings** (Use Class C3) and associated access, car and cycle parking, structural landscaping and amenity space provision. This was approved on 26/3/2020.

Intervention	S106 Contribution
Affordable Housing	22%
Early Years contribution	£59,976
Secondary School Contribution	£49,334
Contribution to management of SUDS	
Contribution to management of open space	£8,000
Library contribution – Soham Library	£1,895
Household and Waste Bins	£43 per dwelling

SOH10: Employment allocation, land west of The Shade

Approximately 2 hectares is allocated for employment land (B1/B2/B8 uses).

20/00569 was submitted on 5/5/2020 - **Two restaurants/cafes** within Use Classes A1, A3 and/or A5 with **drive-thrus** and associated car parking, landscaping, infrastructure and associated works. This application decision is pending due for determination by 21 July 2021.

Determination awaited.

SOH11: Employment allocation, land east of the A142 bypass

Approximately 11 hectares of land is allocated for employment development (B1/B2/B8) on land east of the A142 bypass. No applications pending. Development is dependent upon the installation of a roundabout on A142 to provide a safe access to this piece of land from the A142.

SOH 12: Town centre opportunity site, Budgens site.

Approximately 0.55 hectares of land is identified as a 'Town Centre Opportunity Site' No applications pending. The shop is now an ASDA outlet.

SOH13: Town centre opportunity site, Church hall area

Approximately 0.4 hectares of land is allocated as a Town Centre Opportunity Site

Demolition of existing church hall and its replacement with a **residential development of eight single storey dwellings**, access, road, parking and associated site works. Approved 12/8/2009

This application was subject to specific issues of Conservation Area and safety for access to the main street and the treatment of hard and soft landscaping. There had to be an extensive archaeological investigation. The development is completed and fully occupied.

SOH14: Town centre opportunity site, Cooperative store area

Approximately 0.3 hectares of land is allocated as a Town Centre Opportunity Site. No applications pending.

SOH15: Town centre opportunity site, Fountain Lane recreation ground and car park.

Fountain Lane recreation ground and car park (including The Pavilion and other facilities within) should be retained and enhanced, as a key facility for the people of Soham. No applications pending.

Barway

In Barway there is little allowance for additional development but the local plan has designated two areas BAR1 and BAR2, both of which are on the north side of the road into the hamlet. These two areas allow for 5 houses each but the plan also mentions that affordable housing up to 30% should be included.

There have been a number of planning applications for both these areas and these have all been passed although no affordable housing has been included. Most were for large single houses or pairs of houses.

Appendix 2 – Status of planning consents on non allocated sites in Soham and Barway

SOHAM

Land off the Shade (Back of Broad Piece)

Application for an outline planning application for 175 dwellings 19/00717, associated infrastructure and access from Broad Piece was received on 17 May 2019 with subsequent amendments submitted.

The council refused the outline application on 8 March 2021, stating that the proposed development is located within the countryside outside the defined settlement boundary of Soham, where new development is strictly controlled. In addition, it is considered to be an overdevelopment of the site that does not respond positively to the constraints (flood risk, green lanes and the noise of the A142) on the site. The proposal fails to provide a high quality layout with the design having the appearance of being cramped in between the different constraints of the site and for this reason will not form a high quality place for people to live.

Old Soham Health Centre site, Weatheralls

16/00373 - Application for the construction of 10 two storey residential units submitted 27/3/2016 and approved 7/7/2016. Various conditions attached and S106 Agreement requiring payments for wheelie bins £430 to provide two bins to each property and works to the public highway. The access will not be adopted by the Highways authority. Properties all completed.

Site North West Of 34 Bancroft Lane

19/01187/OUT Application for the demolition of existing structures and erection of up to seven dwellings and associated development, submitted 11/8/2019. The outline application was approved on 13/11/2019 but no further plans submitted.

Redeveloping of existing timber yard, 59A Great Fen Road

19/01595/OUT – Application for the construction of 4no. single storey dwellings submitted 13/11/2019 but refused on 19/7/2020 as the site is outside the development envelope and in an unsustainable location.

Cotes Farm, The Cotes

19/01475/OUT Demolition of 4 poultry sheds and development of 0.49h for the provision of 5 dwellings. 17/12/2019 Permission refused as the site is outside the development envelope and in an unsustainable location.

Olympic Tyres, Market Street

19/00753/FUL Application for demolition of existing garage and construction of 2 dwellings. Application approved subject to conditions as the development is in the Conservation area. There was also concern about contamination because of the previous use of the premises as a tyre garage and battery replacement shop. Archaeological investigations will be required.

25 Mereside

20/01174/ Application for the erection of 66 dwelling houses and 42 dwelling flats, a ground floor commercial unit for flexible A1-A5 use, 186 parking spaces - pending decision due to drainage issues. Previous approval : 16/01804/FUM was for a smaller number of houses.

119 Mereside Soham Joinery

17/01000/OUT Application for 4 houses submitted 6/6/2017. This site had previously been put forward for 21 dwellings but was refused – as inappropriate area for such a housing development. Approved 15/9/2017 but no development has commenced.

Old Tiger Stables Northfield Road

18/01540/OUM Application for residential development of up to 18 units to include highways, parking, amenity space and associated works submitted 31/10/2018. This application was withdrawn 19/2/2019 following a number of adverse comments from various consultees.

Land To North Of 22B Northfield Road

17/00291/FUL Application for the construction of 2no. four bedroom, two storey detached dwellings. Submitted 22/2/2017 and approved 5/5/2017. Various conditions are attached to the consent to protect the environment, ensure there was no contamination, flood measures and waste water measures. The development ensures that the visibility access splays were sufficient to ensure safe egress from the site. Both houses are completed.

Great Fen Road

There have been a number of planning applications submitted for developments along Great Fen Road. These have been for either a single house/bungalow or for 2 similar dwellings. Each of these plans has been approved although in each case the site is outside the planning envelope and is in an unsustainable situation. The applications include:

South West of Meadow View Farm The Butts

20/00522/FUM Application submitted on 21/4/2020 with full planning application for the construction of a solar farm and associated works including inverter stations, DNO building, security measures, connection point to the national grid, communications mast, landscaping and upgraded access road from A1123 Wicken Road. The application was approved on 20/10/2020. The planning consent includes conditions regarding environment and tree planting and ensuring that these trees will be protected beyond the use of the solar farm. Flooding issues are also addressed and the need to not disturb the local community.

Downfield Farm, Fordham Road

21/00291 An application submitted on 22/2/2021 for outline application for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of up to 210 dwellings (including self-build and affordable housing), 1 community building, and associated infrastructure. This application is still pending. The site is

outside the development envelop, not allocated within the Local Plan 2015 and the 5 year housing need has been fulfilled. Section 106 requirements for secondary school education provision would be required.

Spencers Mill, Mereside

19/00505/FUL An application was submitted on 5/4/2019 to fully refurbish the Mill with extensions to create a theatre and cultural/community hub, multi-use auditorium/ event space, bar/cafe/social area and stage area, with associated works and parking. The application was approved with conditions on 31/5/2019.

BARWAY

There a number of planning applications submitted for areas in Barway outside the planning allocation areas which have also been approved.

19/00186/FUL Application submitted 1/2/2019 for 5 bedroom house, garage etc, sited on the south side of the road into Barway Approved 24/5/2019.

19/00286/FUL Application submitted on 22/2/2019 for a 5 bedroom house, garage etc sited on the south side of the road into the hamlet, next door to the east of the previous application. This plan was approved on 24/5/2019.

20/00203/FUL Application for construction of 3 four bed detached dwellings with associated access. Application submitted 5/2/2020. This site also on the south side of the road and closer to the centre of the hamlet. Approved on 2/4/2020.

20/00243/OUT Application for Single storey dwelling on a site South of the Stables which is again south of the road and behind The Stables. Approved 11/6/2020.

20/01662/FUL Application for a two bedroom, single storey dwelling and associated works on adjacent site to previous plan, behind the Stables. Withdrawn

21/00619/FUL Application for a two bedroom, single storey dwelling and associated works (Self Build) on a site south of The Stables. Decision pending.

None of these dwellings approved or pending decisions have provided affordable housing or Section 106 contributions.