

Local Plan Committee

4th April 2016

Item
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| Report of | Head of Commercial Services | Author | Karen Syrett 01206 506477 |
| Title | Settlement Boundary Review | | |
| Wards affected | All | | |

The Local Plan Committee is asked to approve the approach to a review of settlement boundaries in the rural parts of the Borough.

1. Decision(s) Required

- 1.1 To agree an approach to be adopted by officers when reviewing existing village settlement boundaries.

2. Reasons for Decision(s)

- 2.1 It is necessary as part of the production of the new local plan to consider the approach taken to the use of settlement boundaries, otherwise known as village envelopes.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Committee could decide not to review settlement boundaries but this would be contrary to Paragraphs 14 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework which indicates that Local Plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This should be done by identifying and providing for objectively assessed needs and by indicating how the presumption will be applied locally.

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 To inform the preparation of the Local Plan the Council undertook two formal Call for Sites consultations. Many proposals were put forward including sites outside of Colchester in the rural parts of the borough. All these are being assessed along with other sites identified as part of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment. As a result of this it is likely that there will be changes to the existing settlement boundaries in some towns and villages.
- 4.2 To inform this process and as part of the evidence base for the settlement boundary review an assessment of the comparative sustainability of all settlements has been carried out. This can be used to define the most sustainable settlements and inform the hierarchy

and approach to the spatial strategy, particularly for planning growth beyond the urban edge of Colchester.

- 4.3 Officers have begun this work and the following criteria have been included for assessment of each settlement (and part of settlement where separate settlement boundaries exist):
- Access to sustainable transport (Railway station; bus stop - including crude consideration of quality of service);
 - Environmental constraints;
 - Proximity to community facilities including;
 - Primary School;
 - Public open space;
 - Community / village Hall;
 - Doctors Surgery
 - Proximity to Secondary School;
 - % of people who travel less than 2km to work (RCCE Profile);
 - Total Population;
 - Total Households.
- 4.4 Having summarised the data for each settlement under each criteria it is necessary to make judgements and draw conclusions from it. As the underlying principle of the NPPF and therefore the new Local Plan is to support the principle of sustainable development, it is important that the settlement boundaries and any new allocations for growth relate to sustainable locations. With this in mind, it is considered that the Local Plan should define those settlements which are “sustainable” using evidence to justify this. By implication any other settlements (or parts of settlements currently defined by a settlement boundary) are unsustainable (or less sustainable). There are some villages where there is currently more than one defined settlement boundary (SB), for example Aldham, where despite there being just 120 dwellings there are three SB’s. Consideration has to be given to what purpose the settlement boundaries serve and if it is still appropriate or necessary to have so many.
- 4.5 The approach officers are suggesting assumes that only the settlements which can be justified as being sustainable should be defined by settlement boundaries in future. Furthermore, if this approach is adopted, new allocations would only be appropriate within the new sustainable settlements.
- 4.6 An example of a Sustainable Settlement is Wivenhoe. This is one of the largest settlements in the borough and is supported by a good range of services and facilities, including a train station, primary schools, shops and restaurants. It is therefore appropriate to retain and review the settlement boundary and allocate sites for future growth. This process is being undertaken by the Wivenhoe neighbourhood plan Group. A copy of the existing settlement boundary is attached as Appendix 1 to aid discussion on the principles in this report.

4.7 Implications of definition as 'Other Villages'

Those villages which are not considered to be sustainable settlements would be known as Other Settlements and would not have village envelopes. The initial reaction to removing village envelopes is one of concern for fear that it will lead to less protection and more development. In fact the opposite is likely. By definition these areas will be defined as countryside in planning policy terms and having identified them as unsustainable locations they would not generally benefit from the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

4.8 An example of an Unsustainable Settlement would be Little Horkesley. There are just 190 residents living in 75 households in the whole parish. Approximately 40 of the dwellings are currently within the village envelope. It lacks services and facilities and is not well served by public transport so accessing these services elsewhere is difficult. It is also located within the Dedham vale AONB. It will be unsustainable whether or not there is a village envelope. A copy of the existing village envelope is attached as Appendix 2 to aid discussion on the principles in this report.

4.9 Policies for the countryside areas would however need to be clear about how proposals within small hamlets / clusters which are essentially countryside will be dealt with. The Rural Exception Site policy would also need to be clear that sites may be acceptable adjacent to a hamlet rather than just adjacent to a settlement boundary. This may be less important given the Government approach to affordable housing, starter homes and rural exception sites.

4.10 Villages with more than one Settlement Boundary

There are a number of settlements where there is more than one settlement boundary defined. Aldham was given as an example above and Boxted is another. In accordance with the criteria above it may be that one settlement remains based on the biggest concentration of dwellings and facilities, more than one remains or in future there are none.

4.11 Proportional Growth

If Members agree the approach outlined above and in accordance with the Options agreed for future growth last year, officers will be seeking to identify sites to accommodate proportional growth to those settlements identified as sustainable. There is no "one size fits all" approach such as a specified % growth or x number per settlement. There is instead a need to have a robust justification for the proportion taken forward for each settlement. It was therefore agreed that the following key considerations should inform "proportionate growth" and appropriate capacity on a settlement by settlement basis;

- Environmental Constraints/environmental capacity;
- Physical Constraints/capacity - including immovable/ absolute constraints (such as railway lines / rivers, etc);

- Capacity of physical and social infrastructure and tipping point for requirements/likely viability implications - eg school capacity/ physical capacity for expansion / cost and trigger points;
- Current population and households for whole parish – this would be used to arrive at potential growth proportions and test various levels, but if environmental/physical and infrastructure capacity issues are evident a high / low proportion of growth may be justified
- Parish Council views / support.

5. Proposals

- 5.1 Members are asked to agree the following approach to settlement boundaries;
- Only Sustainable Settlements should in future have settlement boundaries defined.
 - All other areas including Other Settlements will be classified as countryside.
 - Proportional Growth in those Sustainable Settlements will be based on the criteria identified above at para. 4.11
 - Changes will be made to existing settlement boundaries where new allocations are proposed.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 Effective strategic planning supports the Strategic Plan Action Plan which includes a commitment to make Colchester a vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming place.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 Consultation will take place on the Local plan preferred Options in the summer.

8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 This report and discussion is intended to address and prevent any negative publicity by setting out the reasoning for any changes in the approach to settlement boundaries.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications.

10. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan and is available to view by clicking on this link:-
<http://www.colchester.gov.uk/article/4962/Strategic-Policy-and-Regeneration>

or go to the Colchester Borough Council website www.colchester.gov.uk and follow the pathway from the homepage: Council and Democracy > Policies, Strategies and Performance > Equality and Diversity > Equality Impact Assessments > Strategic Policy and Regeneration and select Local Development Framework from the Strategic Planning and Research section.

10.2 There are no particular Human Rights implications.

11. Community Safety Implications

11.1 None

12. Health and Safety Implications

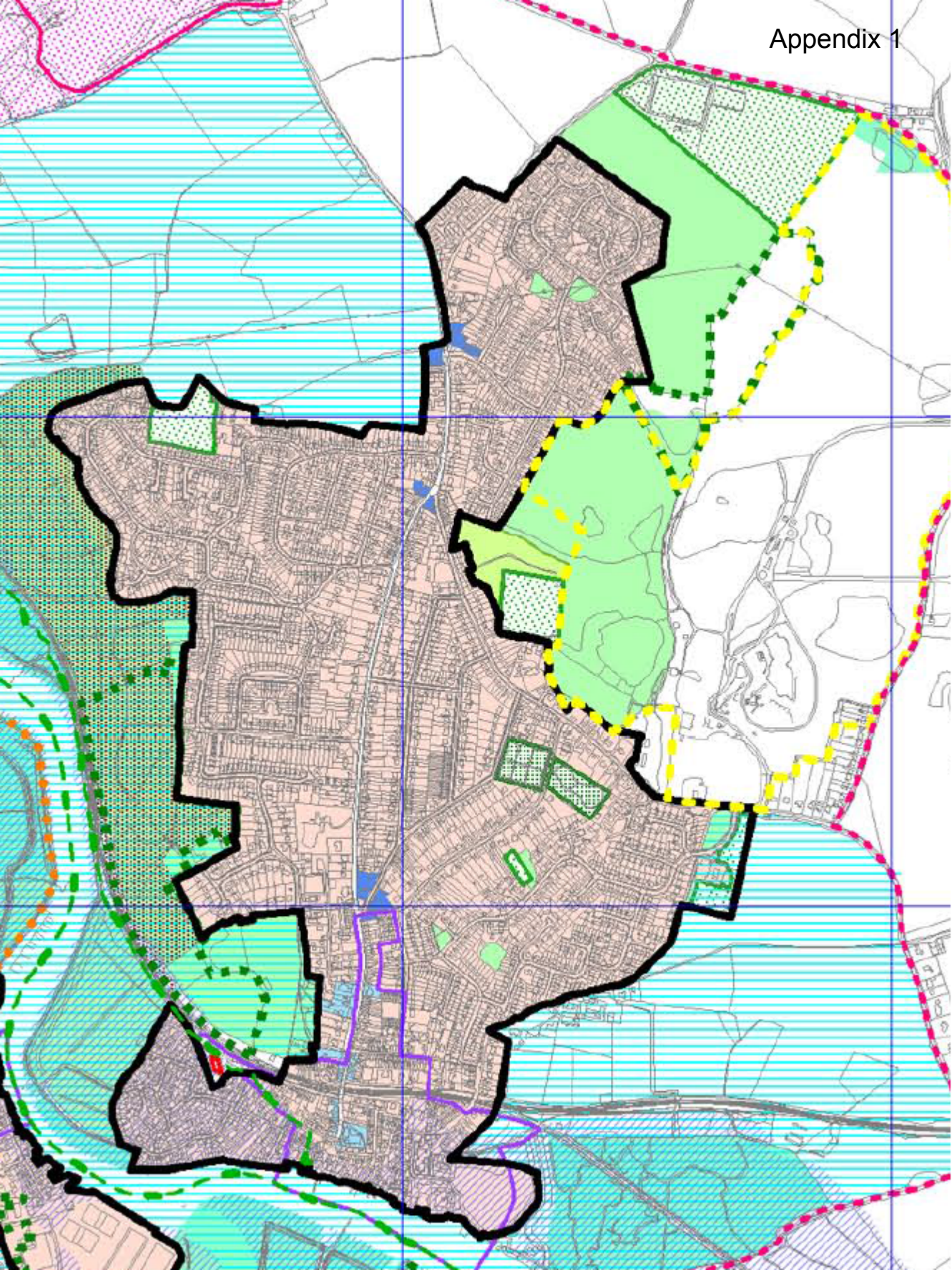
12.1 None

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 This report is intended to set out the Council's approach to development in the rural parts of the borough and minimise the risk of the Local Plan being found unsound.

14. Disclaimer

14.1 The information in this report was, as far as is known, correct at the date of publication. Colchester Borough Council cannot accept responsibility for any error or omission.



Colchester Borough Council Local Development Framework

LITTLE HORKESLEY INSET PROPOSALS MAP

OCTOBER 2010

SCALE - Approximately Eighteen inches, (450mm) to One mile

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