

# Settlement Hierarchy Paper

## Introduction

- 1.1 A settlement hierarchy seeks to identify the function of settlements in a district. It groups and categorises settlements according to the size, economic and retail role, as well as the services and facilities available in the settlement. The purpose of identifying a settlement hierarchy is to inform the spatial strategy for the Local Plan and to ensure that development at existing settlements reflects the relative sustainability of settlements.
- 1.2 This paper identifies a settlement hierarchy for Uttlesford. This hierarchy will be used to ensure that the Local Plan spatial growth strategy focuses housing and economic growth in the most sustainable areas. This is all done with the aim of ensuring the vitality of the district's towns and villages supporting and rural communities by encouraging sustainable development, whilst helping to support and local services and facilities. It is also relevant that larger settlements with more jobs and better services and facilities allow residents to meet more of their day-to-day needs within the settlement offering opportunities to reduce the need to travel (particularly by car), thereby addressing climate change.

## Policy context

- 1.3 The NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development is achieved through three overarching objectives<sup>1</sup>:
1. **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
  2. **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
  3. **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 1.4 The NPPF requires strategic policies to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development<sup>2</sup>. Identifying opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> NPPF paragraph 8

<sup>2</sup> NPPF para 20

<sup>3</sup> NPPF para 79

## **Background**

- 1.5 Uttlesford is a large rural District in Northwest Essex covering approximately 250 square miles. The district includes two market towns that serve extensive rural hinterlands and has 60 parishes. A number of larger villages also provide services to their surrounding catchment areas.
- 1.6 The two major settlements, Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, are market towns with town centres providing a range of services to an extensive rural catchment area. These towns provide vital facilities for the district such as schools, health services and nearly all the district's food shopping needs. They are also important cultural and leisure destinations for the district and beyond. There are a number of larger villages: Stansted Mountfitchet, Thaxted, Elsenham, Great Chesterford, Hatfield Heath, Newport and Takeley. Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted provide local centres, while the other villages also provide a range of services to the surrounding rural areas. There are a large number of smaller villages which mainly provide services for their local communities. Smaller hamlets, groups of cottages and isolated homes and farmsteads are scattered across the district. About 70% of the district's population live in the villages and countryside outside Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow. The distinct rural character of the district with its attractive and historic market towns and villages is widely recognised.
- 1.7 Beyond the District the nearest towns are Bishop's Stortford and Braintree which both lie close to the district's southern boundaries, whilst Cambridge and Chelmsford are also accessible and provide a greater range of services. Further afield is London with good transport links to the district by both road and rail. The southwest of the district includes the outer edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt around Bishop's Stortford. London Stansted Airport is located in the south of the district surrounded by a designated Countryside Protection Zone.
- 1.8 There is one major employment centre in the south of the District at London Stansted Airport. Chesterford Research Park is also a key employment area in the north. The district is central to the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor economic growth area and in particular the importance of London Stansted Airport and its role within the South Cambridgeshire research and bio-technology cluster focused on Chesterford Research Park. Other employment is focused on smaller industrial estates or premises in Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.
- 1.9 The district has a limited transport network with the best infrastructure along the M11 and A120 corridors and rail links to London and Cambridge. Transport connections in the district are focused on the M11, A120 and train stations on its western and southern edges. The M11 J8 interchange is a key junction in the district providing access to London Stansted Airport and the M11 and A120 transport corridors. The B184 forms a lesser but still important north / south spine for the district connecting its two largest settlements. In the rest of the district the highway network and transport connections in general are very limited.

### **Previous settlement hierarchies**

- 1.10 The Local Plan 2005 does not set out a formal settlement hierarchy, however it setting a strategy for development it does define a hierarchy of sorts:
1. Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet are recognised as the main urban areas, which act as service centres and hubs for surrounding areas.
  2. The A120 corridor was identified for growth at Takeley (Priors Green), Felsted (Flitch Green) and Stansted Distribution Centre.
  3. Selected key rural settlements – Elsenham, Great Chesterford, Newport, Takeley and Thaxted were identified as key rural settlements, located on main transport networks and having local employment opportunities.
  4. Other villages are categorised together.
- 1.11 The Local Plan withdrawn in 2020 set out the following settlement hierarchy for existing settlements:
1. Main towns: Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow;
  2. Key villages: Elsenham, Stansted Mountfitchet, Great Chesterford, Takeley, Hatfield Heath, Thaxted, and Newport;
  3. Type A villages: Ashdon, Flitch Green, Little Hallingbury, Birchanger, Great Easton, Manuden, Chrishall, Great Sampford, Quendon and Rickling, Clavering, Hatfield Broad Oak, Radwinter, Debden, Henham, Stebbing, Farnham, Leaden Roding, Wimbish, and Felsted; and
  4. Type B villages: Arkesden, Hadstock, Little Easton, Aythorpe Roding, Hempstead, Little Dunmow, Barnston, High Easter, Ugley, Berden, High Roding, Wendens Ambo, Broxted, Langley, Wicken Bonhunt, Elmdon, Lindsell, Widdington, Great Canfield, Littlebury, White Rodin, Great Hallingbury, Little Canfield and other small villages and hamlets.

### **Review**

- 1.12 It is appropriate to review the settlement hierarchy from previous iterations to take into account changes in services and infrastructure. This could include closures of public houses or post offices, and changes in bus services. The relative importance of infrastructure has changed too, the spread of high-speed broadband facilitating home working and access to services has somewhat reduced the importance of a bus services and access to some types of employment. The pandemic has sped up this process. There have also been changes in population and the relative size of settlements. Differences in the relative growth of settlements could lead to different placements in the hierarchy.
- 1.13 It is also appropriate to review the settlement hierarchy to reflect the council's draft vision and objectives and preliminary outline strategy. These have been developed using the representations received during the Issues and Options consultation (and other sources) and represent a different set of priorities from previous Local Plans. For example, addressing climate change is elevated, reflecting the climate emergency declared by the Council in 2019.

## **Methodology**

### Consultation

- 1.14 Responses received during the Issues and Options consultation highlight the importance of good services and facilities to support development such as a shop, public house and a school. The character of individual settlements is important and should be protected. Further information from this consultation can be found on the Council website [here](#).

### What factors should be considered when assessing the sustainability of a settlement

- 1.15 Multiple factors need to be taken into account when determining how sustainable a settlement is and therefore where in the hierarchy it is placed. These factors will be examined in turn and this paper will consider how they can inform the hierarchy.

### *Services*

- 1.16 The ability of a settlement's population to access services such as shopping, health and education are important for their quality of life. Long distance travel to access services is undesirable as this leads to increased car use and impact on the Council's objectives relating to climate change. It also makes these services more difficult to access for residents and increases the time taken to access services. This assessment therefore looks at the services available in the settlements in the district, these are listed at appendix 1. A consultation with Town and Parish Councils in February 2021 was undertaken to inform the services identified in each settlement.
- 1.17 Settlements at the top of the hierarchy are expected to have a wide range of services, including secondary education, a doctors surgery and a supermarket. In a rural district like Uttlesford, these settlements would also be expected to serve the surrounding area as well as their own population. Villages which are higher up the hierarchy would be expected to have some key services too, such as a primary school, post office and public house.

### *Existing population*

- 1.18 The number of people already living in a settlement is a factor in determining its place in the hierarchy. Settlements with a larger population attract (and require) a wider range and amount of, jobs, transport infrastructure, open space etc. Settlements with a larger population also have a greater capacity to accommodate development than smaller settlements, whose character, infrastructure and services may be overwhelmed by a similar amount of development.
- 1.19 Population statistics have been taken from the ONS 2019 population estimates for parishes. However, there are some anomalies for example relating to Birchanger and Stansted Mountfichet, where the 2011 parish boundaries mean that some homes in Stansted Mountfichet village are counted as being with Birchanger. The table at appendix 1 has been adjusted to reflect the homes built in Stansted Mountfichet Parish.

### *Transport Infrastructure*

- 1.20 Better transport infrastructure supports residents' ability to access jobs, services, exercise and social activities. Road infrastructure plays a part in this, and the M11, A120, B184 and B1383 all enable residents to access destinations more easily outside of their settlement. A

settlement's proximity to these road connections will be considered in determining its place in the hierarchy.

- 1.21 In an ideal world the transport infrastructure for settlements would promote travel by means other than the car, in order to reduce the impact on the environment, congestion and to promote health benefits. In a rural district like Uttlesford this is challenging due to the low population density. The presence of a railway station, frequent bus service, or cycle route will also be taken into account in determining a settlements' position in the hierarchy.

#### *Form of the settlement*

- 1.22 The form of a settlement is how its buildings are arranged along roads and natural features such as rivers and hills. Settlements can be nucleated (focussed around a central point such as shops or a church), linear (arranged along roads) or dispersed (groups of buildings spread out over a wider area, with no recognisable centre).
- 1.23 In terms of deciding the settlement hierarchy, the form of the settlement comes into play in when looking at the lower parts of the hierarchy. In some parishes in the District, there may be buildings and settlements, that are so dispersed that it does not form the same 'centre of mass' as a more concentrated settlement, this would move the settlement further down the hierarchy and settlement with a nucleated or linear form would be moved up the hierarchy.

#### *Weighting*

- 1.24 There is no formal weighting of different criteria/inputs to the hierarchy it is based on examining the factors and coming to a judgement. There is a risk that formal weighting can lead to a formulaic approach which ignores nuance.

#### **The Hierarchy**

- 1.25 Having considered the policy context, consultation response, previous settlement hierarchies and a methodology for reviewing the hierarchy, this paper now turns to determining a new settlement hierarchy for the emerging Local Plan.
- 1.26 A settlement's position in the hierarchy is informed by all the factors described in this paper. A summary of the hierarchy, the populations of the settlements and the level of service provision can be seen in appendix 1.

#### Structure of the hierarchy

- 1.27 Settlements in the hierarchy have been organised into groups and ranked in four different tiers, all settlements not identified in the hierarchy and without development limits are classified as countryside. This section explains the rationale behind why settlements have been grouped and ranked as they have, as well as explaining any exceptions to this. This is informed by the information set out in appendix 1.

#### *Rural Centre*

- 1.28 The top tier in the hierarchy is defined as a rural centre; these are: Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. These rural centres are the largest settlements in the district and contain very good services and facilities (for Uttlesford), serving not just their own residents, but a hinterland around them. They also have relatively good transport

infrastructure linking them with other settlements. Stansted Mountfitchet is in some ways subservient to Bishops Stortford, with residents using services and facilities in Bishops Stortford. However, the fact that it is the largest settlement in the district with a railway station, alongside other services and facilities, means that residents of Stansted Mountfitchet are able to meet many more of their needs than residents of settlements lower down the hierarchy.

#### *Local Rural Centre*

1.29 The second tier in the hierarchy is defined as a Local Rural Centre; these are: Takeley (including Priors Green), Elsenham, Thaxted, Newport, Hatfield Heath and Great Chesterford. They:

- Have between 1,675 and 5,398 residents;
- Have a primary school (and in Newport's case a secondary school);
- Have at least one food shop;
- Have a railway station or at least an hourly bus service (except Thaxted);
- Are all nucleated or linear settlements built around a core that serves the settlement and a small rural hinterland.

1.30 Felsted and Flitch Green are the same relative size as these Local Rural Centres. Felsted is made up of a number of different villages and hamlets each with different services and facilities, it is consequently not considered to have the same 'centre of mass' as Local Rural Centres and does not act as a service centre in the same way they do. Flitch Green does not have the same variety or number of services and facilities as other Local Rural Centres, for example it has no public house.

1.31 Newport is the only Local Rural Centre with a secondary school, it also has a railway station unlike two of the three Rural Centres. It is therefore a candidate for consideration as a Rural Centre, however size of the settlement and the relatively limited services and facilities when compared to Rural Centres, means that Local Rural Centre is the appropriate classification.

#### *Type A villages*

1.32 The third tier in the hierarchy is defined as Type A villages; these are:

- Felsted;
- Flitch Green;
- Birchanger;
- Little Hallingbury;
- Stebbing;
- Clavering;
- Henham;
- Hatfield Broad Oak;
- Wimbish;
- Great Easton;
- Ashdon
- Debden
- Manuden
- Quendon & Rickling

- Radwinter
- Leaden Roding
- Great Sampford
- Chrishall
- Farnham

1.33 These parishes all have a primary school and limited services such as a public hall, public house or in some instances a post office. Their population is between 450 and 3,183, though the larger parishes such as Felsted and Flitch Green have limited services or a dispersed settlement pattern, as discussed above. Birchanger Parish include dwellings that are in the village of Stansted Mountfitchet and this distorts the population and dwellings in Appendix 1. Excluding these three parishes, the parish with the largest population is Little Hallingbury with 1,641 residents.

#### *Type B Villages*

1.34 The fourth and final tier in the hierarchy is defined as Type B villages; these are:

- Little Canfield (excluding Priors Green)
- Barnston
- Littlebury
- Great Hallingbury
- High Easter
- Elmdon
- High Roding
- Broxted
- Swards End
- Widdington
- Wendens Ambo
- Little Easton
- Berden
- Hempsted
- Ugley
- Great Canfield
- Arkesden
- Little Dunmow
- White Roding
- Langley
- Hadstock
- Little Bardfield
- Aythorpe Roding
- Lindsell
- Little Sampford
- Little Chesterford
- Wicken Bonhunt
- Margaret Roding
- Chickney
- Strethall

- Tilty
- Wenden Lofts

1.35 These villages do not have a primary school, but may have some limited local services.



## Appendix 1: Services available in the settlements in the district

Parish / village	2011 resident population <sup>4</sup>	2019 Population estimate <sup>5</sup>	2011 number of dwellings (all types)	Dwellings built 2011 - 2020 (net) <sup>6</sup>	Estimated no of dwellings April 2020 (column D+E)	No. of Primary schools	No. of secondary schools	No. of doctors surgeries	No. of Dentists (NHS/Private)	No. of food shops	No. of post offices (0.5 =Part Time)	No. of Pharmacies	No. of pubs (open / Closed ??)	Employment - strategic	Employment - rural cluster	No. of Public Halls	No. of children's play areas	No. of MUGA / skatepark / BMX tracks	No. of Sports Pitch(s) with Community Use (excl school sites)	No. of Indoor sports halls	No. of allotments	Bus score based on frequency 0= no service 0.5= intermittent 1= 2 hourly 2=hourly or better	No. of railway stations
Saffron Walden	15,504	17373	6,764	1070	7,834	4	1	2	6	9	2	2	8			3	5	2	4	3	5	2	
Great Dunmow	8,830	10333	3,961	840	4,801	2	1	2	4	3	1	2	7			2	4	1	3	2	2	2	
Stansted Mountfitchet	6,011	6864	2,624	645	3,496	3	1	1	3	2	1	2	7			4	5	2	1	1	3	2	1
Takeley	3,367	5398	1,397	590	1,987	2			2	2	1	1	3			3	1	1	3	1		2	
Thaxted	2,845	3484	1,245	238	1,483	1		1	1	2	1	1	5			2	1		2		2	0.5	
Felsted	3,051	3183	1,122	110	1,232	1		1		1	1		2			2	4	1	1	1	1	2	
Birchanger	1,589	2677	632	17	422	1				1			1			1	1		1		1	2	
Elsenham	2,446	3288	980	506	1,486	1		1		1	1		1			1	1		2		1	1	1
Flitch Green	2,190	2773	751	132	883	1				1						1	1		1	1		2	
Newport	2,352	2645	974	339	1,313	1	1	1		1		1	2			1	2		1	1	1	2	1
Hatfield Heath	1,930	2071	747	47	794	1		1		1	0.5		2			1	1		2		2	2	
Wimbish	1,629	1798	505	39	544	1							1			1	1		2			0.5	
Little Hallingbury	1,582	1641	585	33	618	1					0.5		1			1			1			2	
Great Chesterford	1,494	1675	627	151	778	1		2		1			3			1	2	1	1			2	1
Stebbing	1,300	1386	551	52	603	1				1			1			2	3		2		1	2	
Clavering	1,238	1392	511	57	568	1				1	1		2			1	1		1		1	0	
Henham	1,233	1316	486	73	559	1				1	0.5		1			1					1	1	
Little Canfield	935	1334	385	143	528								1			1	4				1	2	
Hatfield Broad Oak	1,276	1261	531	16	547	1		1		1	1		2			1	1		1		1	1	
Great Easton	1,035	1125	405	46	451	1							3			1	2		1			0.5	
Ashdon	893	929	373	10	383	1					0.5		1			1	2		2		1	0.5	
Barnston	947	922	373	9	382								1			1	2		1			2	
Debden	778	865	324	16	340	1				1	0.5		1			1	1		1		1	1	
Littlebury	869	848	346	14	360								1			1	2		1			2	
High Easter	754	720	280	10	290						0.5		1			1	1		2		1	0.5	
Great Hallingbury	713	764	279	13	292											1			1			0	
Leaden Roding	616	694	269	5	274	1				1						1						2	
Manuden	677	710	265	26	291	1							1			1	1	1	1	1	2	0.5	
Elmdon	610	643	269	11	280											2			1			0	

<sup>4</sup> 2011 census (www.nomisweb.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Parish population estimates for mid-2001 to mid-2019 based on best fitting output areas to parish (ONS, October 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Dwellings adjusted to reflect changed parish boundaries since 2011 (n.b. population does not appear to be adjusted resulting in a disparity in this table)

Great Sampford	586	597	232	5	237	1									1	1	1	1			0	
Quendon and Rickling	587	649	249	40	289	1							1		1			2		1	2	
Radwinter	612	648	243	41	284	1					0.5		1		1	1		1			0.5	
Chrishall	555	569	224	12	236	1							1		1	1		1			0.5	
Broxted	508	513	208	18	226								1		1						2	
Sewards End	511	532	186	23	209										1	1		1			0.5	
High Roding	478	581	191	40	231								1		1	1		1		1	0.5	
Berden	465	483	183	6	189										1	1					0.5	
Widdington	504	484	193	12	205						0.5		1		1	1				1	2	
Wendens Ambo	473	464	180	22	202						1		2		1	1		1			2	1
Great Canfield	414	458	164	9	173										1			1			0	
Ugley	449	465	169	7	176										1						2	
Chickney	not available	435	not available	1	not available																0	
Hempstead	451	415	176	8	184								1		1	1					0.5	
Farnham	410	450	181	6	187	1							1		1	1		1			0	
Little Easton	437	421	187	2	189								1		1	1		2			0.5	
Langley	355	375	147	3	150								1		1	1		1			0.5	
Arkesden	366	398	150	13	163								1		1	1					0	
Hadstock	332	350	133	5	138										1	1		1			0.5	
Wenden Lofts	not available	343	not available	0	not available																0	
White Roding	327	337	143	10	153											1		1			2	
Lindsell	260	273	97	5	102						farm shop				1			1			0.5	
Tilty	not available	259	not available	3	not available																0	
Little Bardfield	264	267	107	4	111													1			0	
Little Dunmow	284	257	119	41	160								1		1	1					2	
Little Sampford	251	235	95	2	97																0	
Wicken Bonhunt	223	242	89	3	92								1								0	
Aythorpe Roding	214	243	89	20	109								1		1			2		1	0.5	
Strethall	not available	247	not available	1	not available																0	
Margaret Roding	218	223	79	1	80																2	
Little Chesterford	215	243	87	6	93										1						2	
			32,862	5627	38,489																0= no service	
					38,484																0.5= intermittant	
																					1= 2 hourly approx	
																					2= hourly or better	