

2018

MELTON LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

MATTER 2: OVERALL SPATIAL STRATEGY

PLANIT-X ON BEHALF OF ASFORDBY PARISH COUNCIL, BELVOIR
ESTATE, MRS GREY

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2.1 Does the Plan provide a sound framework for the roles that will be played by various parts of the Borough in meeting development needs over the plan period? In particular:

ii) are they founded on robust evidence, consistent with national planning policy and deliverable?

Introduction

1. The role of each of the villages in providing for the development needs of the Borough is based upon the availability of four 'essential' services and facilities:
 - primary school;
 - access to employment opportunities;
 - fast broadband; and
 - a community building.

Service Centre

2. A Service Centre must have all four of the essential services and facilities.

Rural Hubs

3. Rural Hubs must have at least three, with one of those being a primary school. Settlements within 500m of a Service Centre or 2.5km of Melton Mowbray are also identified as a Rural Hub, due to their proximity of higher-order services and facilities.

Rural settlements

4. These are small villages or hamlets that have little or no local services, where residents are entirely dependent upon travelling to a nearby settlement or town or city for work, recreation and service provision.

National Planning Policy Guidance

5. Of relevance to rural services and facilities the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the following guidance:
 - "To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. For example where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby."
 - "Promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship"
 - "Plans and decisions should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised"

- “To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:
 - Plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments
 - Guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs
 - Ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.”

- 6. The most relevant aspects of the NPPF in relation to the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy matters include:
 - The Core Principle that planning should actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable (para 17).
 - Local Planning Authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances (para 55).
 - Planning policies should ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services (para 70).

- 7. The NPPF provides key principles that underpin development of a successful settlement hierarchy that can be attributed to;
 - Development provided in areas with access to the widest range of essential services and facilities where the need to travel is minimised;
 - That development is distributed in a way that is commensurate with the role and services provided by different settlements and the ability of infrastructure to cope with additional growth;
 - Where facilities are not available within individual settlements, higher order settlements are easily accessible by a choice of transport modes (that do not rely solely on the private car);
 - To plan positively for the growth in the more sustainable settlements and avoid high levels of sporadic growth in smaller settlements;
 - To allow an appropriate level of development that will protect or enhance essential services and facilities in existing settlements;
 - To ensure that development is provided in settlements where there will not be adverse impacts on the built and natural environment, such as increased flood hazards, impact on areas / buildings of historic value or the character of settlements (including important gaps between towns and villages).

8. In this context, we are concerned that Melton Borough Council's approach to the Borough's settlement hierarchy is far too simplistic and consequently gives rise to outcomes that will not deliver sustainable development.

Economic

9. Valued rural services such as shops and public houses have not been considered in determining the role of settlements in providing for the development needs of the Borough. Consequently, the Melton Local Plan (MLP) may not allow for an appropriate level of development to protect or enhance these facilities.

Pubs

10. In rural areas, the pub is often the centre or hub of community life and can also provide essential services beyond the usual drinks, food or entertainment. Pubs are often located in historic buildings and recognised as 'Assets of Community Value' (ACV). A study by the Institute for Public Policy Research (Pubs and places: the social value of community pubs 2012) concluded that pubs boost the income of other village businesses by around £80,000 a year but also generate up to £120,000 worth of "social benefit" to rural areas. Nationally, the pub industry amounts to two per cent of national GDP and community pubs provide 350,000 full- or part-time jobs (APPBG 2008). For tourists to Melton, village pubs are a beacon.
11. Data from the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) shows 21 pubs a week are being lost across the UK. Rural areas bear the brunt of these closures. Between March 2013 and December 2016, 1,365 rural pubs closed. Melton has recently seen the closure of the following rural pubs: The Plough, Scalford; The Red Lion, Stathern; Marquis of Granby, Waltham on the Wolds, Bluebell, Asfordby; Three Crowns, Somerby; Peacock Inn, Redmile; Gas Gorilla Bar, Barkestone le Vale; The Castle Inn, Eaton; The Fox, Thorpe Stachville.
12. Due to the failure of the Settlement Hierarchy to recognise pubs the MLP allocates no housing development in the following villages that contain pubs: Ashby Folville, Burrough on the Hill, Knossington, Redmile, Saltby, Spoxton, Muston, Branston, Grimston, Cold Overton.
13. The failure of the MLP's Settlement Hierarchy to recognise the importance of public houses is not only contrary to the NPPF, it also at odds with recent MBC campaigns (Appendix 1) and the areas' status as 'the rural capital of food and drink' - MLP section 6.10.

Shops

14. Convenience stores provide an increasingly important role in their local communities. According to The Local Shop Report 2017, published by the Association of Convenience Stores, the convenience sector is now worth £38bn, making it comparable in size to industries like oil and gas, defence and recruitment. Convenience store sales are forecast to increase to £40bn over the next year, and the amount invested by convenience stores is also rising, amounting to £858m over the past year.

15. There are 19,164 rural convenience stores, often providing the only shopping option for the local community. Convenience stores in rural areas provide over 150,000 jobs. 59% of rural stores have no other retail/service businesses close by.
16. Like pubs, rural shops have been in decline. In response, the Leicestershire Rural Partnership which is supported by Melton Borough Council, operates a Village Shop Support Grant to provide necessary financial support to local rural retailers to help ensure their future sustainability.
17. Due to the failure of the Settlement Hierarchy to recognise convenience shops, the MLP allocates no housing development in the following villages that contain a village shop and/or Post Office: Knipton, Buckminster and Plungar.

Social

18. 2016 Population estimates show that Melton has a higher proportion of elderly residents (21.6% aged 65 or over) than any other district in the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing Market area. In England, the proportion of residents aged 65+ is 17.9%.
19. Much of this older population can be found in the rural areas of Melton Borough. The 2011 Census shows the proportion of residents aged 65+ in Melton Mowbray to be 17.5% while in the rural part of the Borough it was 19.4%.
20. 2014-based Subnational Population Projections for Local Authorities in England show that by 2036, 30% of Melton's population will be aged over 65.
21. For many older people, living in a small village or rural area is a positive and welcoming idea. However, as they age, older rural residents' requirements for services such as healthcare, social services and public transport increase. For a lot of older people, their local shop or pub is a key part of their social infrastructure. This concern is reflected in MLP Strategic Issue 1 (p18).
22. It is therefore remarkable, that the in a Borough with a high, and growing, proportion of older people, the proposed development strategy ignores the availability of healthcare services, public transport, shops and pubs. Instead, the settlement hierarchy is dependent upon services that older people are less likely to use- primary schools, employment and internet access¹.

Environmental

23. The MLP should encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value in accordance with the NPPF.
24. In Melton, there are several places where there are opportunities for brownfield development, for example the former MoD land at Old Dalby.
25. On the other hand, development should not be provided in settlements where there will be adverse impacts on the built and natural environment, such as

¹ Internet users in the UK: 2017 (ONS) 'Since the survey began in 2011, adults aged 75 years and over have consistently been the lowest users of the internet.'

impact on heritage assets. Several of the Rural Hubs, where housing allocations are to be made are wholly or largely subject to heritage designations e.g. Great Dalby.

26. Owing to the over-simplified approach to the Settlement Hierarchy, new development will be directed away from places of low environment value to those where there are significant environmental constraints.

Transport

27. Outside Melton Mowbray, opportunities for sustainable travel in Melton are limited. Apart from Bottesford that has a passenger rail service, people living in rural Melton and without access to a car largely rely on bus services.
28. Rural bus services provide a lifeline for rural communities, creating vital routes of connection to other parts of the Borough and further afield. For anyone who struggles to drive themselves because of age or a disability, or because they do not have a car, buses are often the only means of transport that connects rural residents with work, friends and family. With an increasing number of local services cut from rural towns and larger villages, the need to be able to connect with urban areas only increases.
29. The problem, of course, is that rural bus services are not particularly profitable. Relatively low footfall and long distances between stops mean that rural bus services, particularly in more remote rural areas, require discretionary local council subsidies to maintain viability. As cuts in local authority funding have taken hold over recent years, rural bus routes have been quickly disappearing. Indeed, the rate of this disappearance is startling. Statistics from the Department for Transport show that bus mileage in local authorities outside London has decreased by 12% in the last year alone.
30. Melton's villages do not exist in self-sustained isolation. As living, breathing communities they depend—like all communities and all people—on interconnection. Whether it is providing care for the elderly, bringing jobs into the local economy, building healthy, diverse and thriving communities, or combating the isolation and loneliness that can be endemic in hard-to-reach places, in such places connectivity is essential.
31. It is particularly important among the elderly. According to Age UK, 40% of people aged 60 or over use local bus services at least once a week, and around a quarter of these journeys are for medical appointments.
32. The proposed settlement hierarchy for Melton has no regard to the availability of public transport. The potential implications are:
 - Development is directed to locations where there are no sustainable travel options; and
 - Existing rural bus services, that are already facing reduced footfall and subsidies, are starved of additional patronage leading to further cuts in

service with implications for rural isolation especially for the elderly, disabled and young mums with children.

Inconsistencies

33. Notwithstanding the above concerns, the of four 'essential' services and facilities have not been consistently applied. For example, the following settlements would seem to qualify as 'Rural Hubs':
- Plungar has a village hall, good internet access and good access to employment opportunities at Langar Airfield (includes CDA Group HQ).
 - Redmile has a primary school, good internet access and has good access to employment opportunities at Langar Airfield. It also has a pub.
 - Knipton has a village hall, good internet access and good access to employment opportunities and higher order services and facilities at Grantham just 6miles away. The village also has a shop/Post Office and pub;

2.2 Does Policy SS3 provide effective guidance for development proposals on unallocated sites in/on the edge of existing rural settlements? How will the risk of inconsistency with the development strategy from repeated application of the policy be assessed?

Introduction

34. MLP Policy SS2 (FC1) states that Service Centres, Rural Hubs and Rural Settlements will accommodate a proportion of the Borough's housing need through the development of 'windfall' sites within and adjoining settlements. This development will be delivered through small unallocated sites which meet needs and enhance the sustainability of the settlement in accordance with Policy SS3.
35. The overall housing provision relies on these sites to deliver 322dw across the plan period to 20136.

National Planning Policy Framework

36. NPPF Appendix 2 defines 'Windfall sites' as 'sites which have not been specifically identified as available in the Local Plan process. They normally comprise previously-developed sites that have unexpectedly become available.'
37. NPPF paragraph 47 requires local planning authorities to boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities and ... 'ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area'.
38. NPPF paragraph 48 allows local planning authorities to make an allowance for windfall sites in the five-year supply 'if they have compelling evidence that

such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply'. Any allowance should be realistic having regard to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, historic windfall delivery rates and expected future trends, and should not include residential gardens.

39. NPPF paragraph 154 states that 'Local Plans should set out the opportunities for development and clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and where. Only policies that provide a clear indication of how a decision maker should react to a development proposal should be included in the plan.'

1999 Melton Local Plan

40. The Melton Mowbray Town Envelope and the Village Envelopes are identified on the 1999 Melton Local Plan Proposal Map and Inset Maps. The Town and Village Envelopes were defined to identify the area within which a general presumption in favour of most forms of development would be applied subject to certain criteria and to identify the remaining area within which generally protective policies would apply as appropriate to the countryside.
41. The Village Envelopes have been a well-established local planning tool for managing development that has:
 - Provided certainty with clarity over what will and will not be permitted and where- transparent and consistent decision making;
 - Provided a managed approach to housing growth;
 - Protected countryside from ribbon development and the coalescence of settlements; and
 - Facilitated rural exception affordable housing schemes.
42. However, the 1999 Melton Local Plan is now time expired and significantly out of date, and so with it the Village Envelopes. Notwithstanding, all of the neighbourhood plans currently being prepared are seeking to re-establish Village Envelopes (or similar).

Policy SS2/SS3

43. Policies SS2 and SS3 allow for windfall development provided a set of broad criteria are met. This is a more relaxed approach to development in villages than the established Village Envelope approach. While providing flexibility, the approach has disadvantages:
 - Policies SS2/SS3 do not make it clear what will or will not be permitted and where;
 - There is no mechanism to ensure that the cumulative impact of development will not lead to the Settlement Hierarchy being undermined nor safeguard the countryside from encroachment;
 - Decision making will be less transparent and consistent;
 - Discourages the recycling of derelict and other land within settlements;
 - Reduces the hope of obtaining planning consent for development outside Village Envelopes with resulting impact on land values. Reduced 'hope

value' facilitates the release of land for rural exception site affordable housing schemes and the provision of community facilities;

- It contradicts that part of Policy SS2 that seeks to protect the open countryside; and
- Provides a confusing policy framework for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans through uncertainty over housing provision and whether the re-establishment of Village Envelopes through neighbourhood plans is an acceptable policy response.

Appendix 1: Melton Times 9 November 2017

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Protect our pubs

Council reviews how it can safeguard local pubs as community assets

Concerns over threats to the future of pubs across the Melton borough have prompted councillors to review the way they deal with plans to close them and change their use.

Melton Council aims to formulate a new policy for determining requests to make pubs part of the borough's Assets of Community Value (ACV), which give them a special status and can be converted into shops or restaurants.

The move follows criticism from the community and councillors that the authority has not been doing enough to protect pubs.

Councillor Higgins is currently reviewing the way the council deals with requests to change the use of pubs. He said: "We have had a lot of requests to change the use of pubs and we need to make sure we are doing the right thing for the community."

Mr Bilson added: "The review will ensure that we are doing the right thing for the community and that we are protecting our pubs as community assets."

Ear treatments soon at Melton

Melton's GP surgery will soon be able to provide ear treatments for patients with hearing loss. The service will be provided by a hearing care team based at the surgery.

Borough councillor Sir Nigel Jackson said: "We are pleased to be able to provide this service to our residents. It will help many people who have been struggling with hearing loss."

The service will be provided by a hearing care team based at the surgery. The team will provide hearing tests and hearing aids to patients who are eligible for the service.

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MELTON TOWN PUBS AT RISK

Golden Pines and Mash Tub are at risk of closure. The council is reviewing the way it deals with requests to change the use of pubs.

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