



Title:

Breckland Local Plan Full Update:

Site Assessments – Phase 1 Report

Date: November 2023

Contents

1	Introduction and Purpose.....	3
2	The proposed site selection process	4
3	Methodology for Site Assessments during Phase 1.....	6
4	Phase 1 Summary Outcome.....	10
5	Next steps towards Phase 2 assessment.....	15

1 Introduction and Purpose

1.1 This Report supports preparation of the Breckland Local Plan Full Update and, in particular, the consultation on Alternative Development Scenarios being undertaken between December 2023 and February 2024. The Report forms part of the range of documents published for information and consultation.

1.2 The Report introduces the initial outcomes of the Call for Sites consultation undertaken by the Council during 2022 [Have Your Say Today - Call For Sites - Breckland Local Plan \(commonplace.is\)](https://brecklandlocalplan.commonplace.is)¹.

1.3 The Call for Sites consultation was an opportunity for anyone with an interest in, or knowledge of potential development sites in Breckland, to submit information about those sites for consideration as potential allocations in the emerging Breckland Local Plan Full Update.

1.4 In response to the Council's Call for Sites, anyone; including businesses, landowners and agents, and residents were able to propose areas of land for any form of development, including:

- Residential development – defining where appropriate the preferred type of residential development (e.g., Market homes, affordable homes, self or custom build housing, elderly / sheltered accommodation etc.)
- Economic development – for uses that relate to the definition of “employment land uses” (e.g., land for factories, warehouses and additionally offices)
- Other development - such as retail, or forms of agricultural and equine development requiring planning permission.
- Local Green Space – specific areas of land that residents and local communities consider to be of sufficient importance to justify protections from

1.1 _____

¹ Call for Sites: Breckland Local Plan - <https://brecklandlocalplan.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/call-for-sites/step1>

stronger protections from development than general policies protecting open space and the countryside.

- 1.5 This paper has been prepared to support the Alternative Development Scenarios consultation and focuses on those sites promoted for housing development.

2 The proposed site selection process

*This report provides an evidence-based assessment of each development site **it does not identify** preferred development allocations.*

The Council will publish information about preferred allocations for development with a Draft Local Plan planned for Spring 2024.

- 2.1 The Council intends to publish its preferred options in a Draft Local Plan for consultation in Spring 2024. At that time the Council will publish its conclusions regarding a preferred development strategy for Breckland and identify the development sites necessary to fulfil that strategy.
- 2.2 The identification of potential sites will continue to be an iterative process until the Council submits a final Draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination. At each stage, the site selection process will be informed by engagement both with town and parish council's, residents, landowners and site promoters, and key stakeholders / consultation bodies with a role in the planning system and management of infrastructure.
- 2.3 As potential preferred sites are identified, further work will be required to understand and confirm the views of the communities in each town and parish regarding the development strategy. The preferred site selection process will be informed by:
- i. **Phase 1** – identification of high-level alignment of sites to the Alternative Development Scenarios (December 2023)
 - ii. **Phase 2** – Development of a Preferred Development Option informed by the views of communities and town and parish Council during the Alternative Development Scenarios consultation; and further analysis of sites based on

development constraints and opportunities and broad infrastructure capacity (April 2024), informed by:

- (a) Integrated Assessment of the development strategy and sites against a range of sustainability objectives.
- (b) Progressing further discussion with key consultees such as the Highways Authority, Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England on specific impacts or constraints that might arise from the emerging development options.
- (c) Identification of preferred sites based on an assessment of those that:
 - (i) Align most closely with the Preferred Development Option and settlement hierarchy.
 - (ii) Prioritise use of brownfield land.
 - (iii) Adequately avoid or mitigate their potential environmental impacts, respecting and enhancing Breckland's landscape and character.
 - (iv) Make best use of existing infrastructure.
- ii. **Phase 3** – Publication of preferred development options and site allocations for consultation (April 2024)
- iii. **Phase 4** – Further refinement and development of development options, following Preferred Options consultation and consideration of specific infrastructure requirements to ensure sustainable development (April to December 2025)
- iv. **Phase 5** – Inclusion of the proposed Site Allocations with supporting allocation policies and infrastructure requirements in a Publication Draft Local Plan (January 2025)

3 Methodology for Site Assessments during Phase 1

- 3.1 This Report outlines the initial analysis that has been undertaken of submitted sites and informs initial conclusions regarding those few sites that it considers conflict with each of the Alternative Development Scenarios and therefore are not reasonable options to carry forward to future Phases of analysis.
- 3.2 This Report informs creation of a “long-list” of potential development sites to assess against each Alternative Development Scenarios. In other words, there are substantially more sites submitted to the Council than are required for each of the Alternative Development Scenarios proposed. Further work to refine a preferred list of potential allocations will be undertaken in accordance with the process set out in Section 2 of this Report above and published alongside the Draft Local Plan consultation in Spring 2024.
- 3.3 The work undertaken for Phase 1 is set out in two key steps:
 - i. High level assessment of all submitted sites and alignment with the Alternative Development Scenarios.
 - ii. Outlines the total capacity of submitted sites and the current shortfall or surplus in potential supply against each of the Alternative Development Scenarios.

Methodology for undertaking a high-level assessment of submitted sites

- 3.1 The Phase 1 assessment that has been undertaken of all submitted sites focused on a high-level assessment of each site’s location and immediate surroundings, and alignment of each site to a draft Settlement Hierarchy and the Alternative Development Scenarios.
- 3.2 The criteria reviewed at this stage, the outcomes, and implications of each are outlined in Table 1 below.

Criteria	Description of the Alternatives	RAG Rating
Greenfield / Brownfield	Brownfield: sites that are PDL in accordance with the definition set out in National Planning Policy Framework).	Green
	Mostly Brownfield: sites where most of the land area is PDL.	Amber
	Mostly Greenfield: sites where most of the land area is considered greenfield.	Dark Yellow
	Greenfield: sites that are entirely greenfield	Red
Highway Access (Initial assessment to consider potential scale of access issues)	Yes – adjacent to a main road	Green
	Yes – adjacent to a secondary / tertiary road within settlement.	Green
	In part – some improvements may be required – tbc.	Amber
	No, there appear to be significant constraints to site access.	Red
Pedestrian Access (Initial assessment to consider potential scale of access issues)	Yes – directly to site frontage	Green
	Some – with improvements to access	Amber
	No – significant improvements required	Red
Site topology	Flat or relatively flat	Green
	Gently sloping or uneven	Amber
	Steeply sloping / very uneven	Red
Trees and hedgerows	None - or very few trees / hedgerow on site that could potentially be retained if developed	Green
	Some - one or two trees and/or short section of hedgerow may need to be removed	Amber

Criteria	Description of the Alternatives	RAG Rating
	Significant - potentially a large number of trees / section of hedgerow would need to be removed	Red
Proximity to Brecks SPA Stone Curlew Buffer Zone	None of Parish / Town Council falls within buffer zone	Green
	Part of Parish / Town Council falls within buffer zone	Amber
	All of Parish / Town Council falls within buffer zone	Red
Visual landscape impact	Low - the site is visually enclosed and has low intervisibility with the surrounding landscape.	Green
	Medium - the site is somewhat enclosed and has some intervisibility with the surrounding landscape.	Amber
	High - the site is visually open and has high intervisibility with the surrounding landscape	Red
Built up area	Within the existing built-up area (infill)	Green
	Adjacent to the existing built-up area	Amber
	Outside and not connected to the existing built-up area	Red
Current settlement boundaries	Within the existing settlement boundary?	Green
	Adjacent to and connected to the existing settlement boundary?	Amber
	Outside and not connected to the existing settlement boundary?	Red
Potential coalescence	No – i.e., the development might extend the existing built area but would not risk merging with another settlement	Green
	Yes – i.e., the development would lead to or risk the merging of two currently separate settlements	Red

Criteria	Description of the Alternatives	RAG Rating
Scale and size of settlements – would development be out of keeping?	No - the site would be in keeping with scale of settlement	Green
	Don't know - whilst not significantly out of keeping impact dependent upon design and setting of schemes	Amber
	Yes - the site would notably grow the settlement	Red
Any known legal, ownership constraints to availability	<p>A statement highlighting if any constraints that extend beyond physical site issue, that may affect availability, exist.</p> <p>-</p>	
Available (timeframe)?	<p>An assessment based on current occupation of site and other feedback, of when the site may become available for development.</p> <p>-</p>	
Achievable (timeframe)	<p>Informed by estimated development rates for each site.</p> <p>-</p>	
Conclusions based on Alternative Development Scenarios Consultation	Aligns with All Scenarios – This only applies to the Local Service Centres of Bawdeswell and Old Buckenham where potential requirements under each scenario and existing supply lead to a requirement in all scenario.	
	Aligns with Scenarios A and C – The site will be within or adjacent to the broad built form of a town where, under these scenarios, new allocations are necessary to fulfil the development strategy. Towns this excludes include Attleborough and Thetford.	
	Aligns with Scenarios A, B and D – The site will be within or adjacent to a Local Service Centre. Local Service Centres where no new allocations are proposed or required under this option include Great Ellingham and Weeting.	
	Aligns with Scenarios B and D – The site will be within or adjacent to a Local Service Centre. Local Service Centres where no new allocations are proposed or required under this	

Criteria	Description of the Alternatives	RAG Rating
	option include Shipdham, Sporle, Swanton Morley, Great Ellingham and Weeting.	
	Aligns with Scenarios C and D – These options introduce the inclusion of a very large garden community site as part of the development mix, as well as allowance for Brownfield development in Thetford (where generally the proximity to the Brecks SPA and scale of current supply mean new allocations are not required).	
	Aligns with Scenarios E and F – These options extend the distribution of potential development to “Villages with boundaries”, the next tier in Breckland’s settlement hierarchy.	
	No scenarios – this relates primarily to those sites that are not within a Town or Local Service Centre or that are assessed as located outside and away from existing built form of settlements – and therefore would be considered development in the countryside.	

3.3 A profile for each site has been prepared that provides a Red, Amber, or Green rating against each of the defined RAG criteria set out in Table 1. This site-specific assessment is included at Appendix 1 of this Report.

3.4 To undertake the assessments, the Council adopted arrange of methods including use of GIS data analysis and individual site-specific survey.

4 Phase 1 Summary Outcome

4.1 This section considers the site assessments and analysis undertaken and the capacity of sites submitted to the Council within each of the proposed Alternative Development Strategies. This provides a general understanding of whether each option is realistic and achievable and highlights any potential gaps in the nature or distribution of potential site options.

4.2 As a reminder the Alternative Development Options set out the following scale of growth across the District:

Table 2: Alternative Development Options - summary of requirements

	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E	Option F
Towns	3,957	0	1,988	0	0	0
Local Service Centre	511	4,467	18	2,008	3,004	1,282
Villages with boundaries	0	0	0	0	1,474	727
Standalone Allocation	0	0	2,460	2,460	0	2,460
Total	4,466	4,467	4,467	4,468	4,467	4,469

- 4.3 The sites assessment work suggests that of over 350 sites submitted to the call for sites process with the aim of seeking residential development. The total unconstrained capacity of those sites within or adjacent to defined Towns, Local Service Centres and Villages with boundaries is 17,910 dwellings. A further 990 homes are in areas outside the proposed development scenarios but potentially adjacent to market towns.
- 4.4 Whilst this is a significant amount of potential development, the Phase 1 process identifies that sites with capacity for approximately 20,500 homes do not accord with any Alternative Development Scenario. Primarily this is because:
- (1) The site is in a location in the countryside, or
 - (2) The site is within or adjacent to a smaller settlement or village where no strategic allocation of development is proposed.
 - (3) Additionally, the development approach also filters out sites that may be near the Brecks SPA,
 - (4) Would deliver predominantly greenfield development in the countryside,

(5) In in a defined, town, local service centre or village with boundary where any allocated growth would result in a potential oversupply of homes.

Table 3 Summary of total site capacity and outcome of Phase 1 Refinement

Settlement / Parish Name	Hierarchy	Total new housing sites submitted	Local Authority capacity estimate	Phase 1 capacity remaining
Attleborough	Town	13	3,543	0*
Dereham	Town	13	3,067	3,067
Swaffham	Town	20	3,513	2,625
Thetford	Town	2	490	490**
Watton	Town	14	873	612
	All towns	62	11,486	6,794
Ashill	Local Service Centre	12	277	277
Banham	Local Service Centre	7	108	108
Bawdeswell	Local Service Centre	5	254	254
Beeston	Local Service Centre	9	90	76
Garboldisham	Local Service Centre	5	240	240
Great Ellingham	Local Service Centre	8	925	0
Harling	Local Service Centre	10	608	608
Hockering	Local Service Centre	2	37	37
Kenninghall	Local Service Centre	4	189	189
Litcham	Local Service Centre	2	400	400
Mattishall	Local Service Centre	5	358	358
Mundford	Local Service Centre	2	80	80
Narborough	Local Service Centre	4	574	484

Settlement / Parish Name	Hierarchy	Total new housing sites submitted	Local Authority capacity estimate	Phase 1 capacity remaining
Necton	Local Service Centre	5	421	377
North Elmham	Local Service Centre	8	204	184
Old Buckenham	Local Service Centre	2	11	11
Shipdham	Local Service Centre	12	397	267
Sporle	Local Service Centre	17	968	719
Swanton Morley	Local Service Centre	11	2,652	2,637
Weeting	Local Service Centre	2	176	0
All Local Service Centres		132	8,969	7,306
Beetley	Village with boundaries	7	199	199
Carbrooke	Village with boundaries	7	1,744	1544
Caston	Village with boundaries	1	5	5
Gressenhall	Village with boundaries	2	10	5
Griston	Village with boundaries	4	641	641
Hockham	Village with boundaries	3	165	0
North Lopham	Village with boundaries	0	0	0
Quidenham	Village with boundaries	5	681	681
Rocklands	Village with boundaries	6	61	56
Saham Toney	Village with boundaries	10	364	352
Shropham	Village with boundaries	0	0	0
Thompson	Village with boundaries	4	100	100
Weasenham	Village with boundaries	2	31	31
Yaxham	Village with boundaries	4	195	195
All villages with boundaries		55	4,196	3,809

Settlement / Parish Name	Hierarchy	Total new housing sites submitted	Local Authority capacity estimate	Phase 1 capacity remaining
	Total	194	24,651	17,910

** Note that for Attleborough and Great Ellingham – the locations are strategically appropriate for growth, and have an apportioned housing requirement but presently have sufficient committed supply to meet that requirement. In addition, Weeting whilst functionally a Local Service Centre is constrained by its proximity to the Brecks SPA.*

As further stages of site assessments arise, any shortfall in capacity for new allocations in any Town or Local Service Centre may lead to an increase in requirements for the remaining settlements where capacity exists.

***Alignment with growth options at Thetford is the result of the specific inclusion of Abbey Estate within Options C and D.*

Potential small sites capacity

- 4.1 The Alternative Development Options paper notes that to respond to the NPPF's expectation that 10% of allocated dwellings will be on small sites – some 446 homes are needed.
- 4.2 Analysis of the submitted sites suggests that a total of 133 small sites of less than 1 hectare – with a total estimated capacity of 1,248 - were submitted. Due to a substantial proportion of these sites being located across the District in smaller settlements, the proposed Alternative Development Options, focused on larger settlements filter out around half of this capacity.

Small sites capacity in accordance with proposed Alternative Development Options:

	Capacity	Number of sites
Towns	100	7
Local Service Centre	318	34

Villages with boundaries	34	3
Other settlement/village	211	22
Total	663	66

4.3 The initial findings of this assessment, indicate that with the inclusion of potential allocations in Villages with boundaries there may be sufficient available small sites to address the 10% target. There would be a slight shortfall against this target if scenarios based on directing development to Towns or Local Service Centres alone are pursued. However, some further appropriate opportunities may exist – including in other settlements or villages adjacent to Towns.

5 Next steps towards Phase 2 assessment

5.1 This initial high-level assessment for Phase 1, concludes with an assessment of the alignment of each site to the emerging development options. Subject to the outcome of consultation on Alternative Development Options further, more detailed, site assessments will be undertaken on a smaller range of sites.

5.2 This will include feedback from key consultees and stakeholders on the potential constraints, impacts and infrastructure requirements of sites. It will additionally be informed by spatial analysis that will, in summary, collate information for each site retained to confirm whether it is:

(1) Predominantly, or wholly, within or adjacent to the following environmental designations:

- Ancient Woodland
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)
- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Ramsar Site
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)

- Nutrient Neutrality Catchment Area
 - SSSI Impact Risk Zone
 - Green Infrastructure Corridor
 - Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
 - Public Open Space
 - Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)
 - Nature Improvement Area
 - Regionally Important Geological Site
- (2) Site is predominantly, or wholly, within Flood Zones 2 or 3.
 - (3) Site is at risk of surface water flooding.
 - (4) Key utility constraints such as pylons, pipelines, or other easements.
 - (5) Whether the site is potentially best and most versatile agricultural land.
 - (6) Does the site contain or is within proximity to a designated and/or non-designated heritage asset (built assets / archaeology)?
 - (7) Distance to the facilities (measured from the edge of the site). Accessibility will be assessed based on –
 - (8) **Green** Four or more core services within 800m/10 minutes walking distance of the site in town centres, 1,200m elsewhere and 2,000m for school access and employment
 - (9) **Amber** One to three core services within 800m/10 minutes walking distance of the site in town centres , 1,200m elsewhere and 2,000m for school access and employment
 - (10) **Red** No core services within 800m/10 minutes walking distance of the site in town centres, 1,200m elsewhere and 2,000m for school access and employment or no ability to provide/ fund appropriate new core services.
 - (a) Facilities include:
 - (i) A primary school,
 - (ii) A secondary school
 - (iii) A local healthcare service (doctors' surgery)
 - (iv) Retail and service provision for day to day needs (district/local shopping centre, village shop)
 - (v) Local employment opportunities (principally existing employment sites, but designated or proposed employment area in a local plan will also be considered)
 - (vi) A peak-time public transport service to/from a higher order settlement (peak time for the purposes of this criterion will be 7-9am and 4-6pm).