

SEVENOAKS SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY 2015 UPDATE

Planning Advisory Committee – 13 October 2015

Report of Chief Planning Officer

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: The Sevenoaks Settlement Hierarchy was first prepared in 2007/2008 and was last updated in 2009.

The Settlement Hierarchy was used by the Core Strategy and then the Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP) to determine the level of facilities and services available across the District and identify which settlements are suitable for new sustainable development. As the Core Strategy and ADMP have now both been adopted the Settlement Hierarchy will be updated to act as a monitoring tool to measure the change in the level of services and facilities in the District's settlements. The results are reported in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).

A new Settlement Hierarchy will also be produced to support the Local Plan Review and the development of policies.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Piper

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Recommendation to Planning Advisory Committee:

- a) To the note the Settlement Hierarchy 2015 update for the AMR in Appendix A; and
- b) To discuss and consider the recommendations set out in paragraph 15 regarding the preparation of a new Settlement Hierarchy to support the emerging Local Plan.

Reason for recommendation: In order to consider an important element of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Settlement Hierarchy was first prepared in 2007/2008 to help determine the most appropriate locations for development across the Sevenoaks District. In 2009, the Hierarchy was updated to support the Spatial Vision and Location Policies within the Core Strategy. The Settlement Hierarchy illustrates the level of services and facilities available to support development in the District.

- 2 The Council is required to monitor adopted policies. The Settlement Hierarchy is used as a performance indicator to test the effectiveness of policies within the Core Strategy and the ADMP. Therefore, the Council is obliged to keep the Hierarchy up to date, and publish the findings in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)
- 3 The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan supported by a revised evidence base, which by necessity includes a review of the District housing need figures. A new settlement Hierarchy, independent of the one included in the Authority Monitoring Report will be produced to support the Local Plan review.
- 4 This new hierarchy will illustrate the potential for future development according to the levels of the services and facilities that are available in each settlement. Where a settlement has a greater service score, it is anticipated that the settlement can potentially accommodate a greater level of sustainable development. It also highlights those settlements in the District that have a green belt boundary and those that are “washed over” by the green belt. There is no accounting for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the Hierarchy.
- 5 The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan in line with a revised evidence base, which by necessity includes a review of the District housing need figures. The Settlement Hierarchy will be used as an evidence base in the plan-making process to determine which settlements within the District are the most sustainable in supporting future development.

National Planning Policy Context

- 6 National planning policy states that any development should take place within the most sustainable and deliverable locations. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the plan-making processes for development should “[...]not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives” (NPPF para. 17), and local authorities should plan positively within the most sustainable and deliverable locations. This includes specific policies for individual elements of development, such as town and local service centres in both urban and rural locations. The NPPF stresses that local authorities should promote and retain local and community services within villages as these are considered to be important community assets (NPPF para. 28).

Settlement Hierarchy 2015 update for the AMR

- 7 The Hierarchy was last reviewed in 2009. The 2015 update follows a similar methodology to the 2009 Update. All Town and Parish Councils were sent a list of local services and facilities within their settlements. All Parish and Town Councils responded to the consultation, along with submitting details of public transport provision in the local area. Where a settlement had a service, it received one point accordingly. Where a settlement had two or more of the same services, it received an additional point per service (i.e. 3 primary schools would be given three points). All settlements were given a service score and ranked accordingly.
- 8 The 2015 update uses the same criteria for defining the boundaries of a settlement as follows:

“Where the settlements have Green Belt boundaries these have been taken as the basis for the extent of the settlement. However services/facilities not within the Greenbelt boundaries but clearly associated with the settlement, have been included in the survey, provided they are within approximately 400m of the centre and are easily and safely accessible on foot. In the remaining settlements, where possible, the built up area has been taken as the extent of the settlement but again facilities clearly associated with the settlement have been included.”

- 9 Where a settlement has a Green Belt boundary, the settlement received one additional point. In principle, this was considered favourable, as development should be focused inside the built up areas and not in the green belt.
- 10 A further point was given to settlements that have significant business areas as defined in the Sevenoaks Employment Study.
- 11 One point was given to each 1000 head population within each settlement. Population figures were obtained through 2011 Census data. Where a settlement's population was too small to determine from the Census Output Areas, the electoral roll for each settlement was used, adding 25% to the population figure to account for those not eligible to vote/not registered to vote.
- 12 This process produced a final ranked list of settlements, which can be found in **Appendix A**. This is to be published as part of the next AMR.
- 13 As the last review of the Settlement Hierarchy was carried out in 2009, the intervening six year period has resulted in some changes to the overall settlement classification (Further information on settlement classification can be found in Appendix A). Below is a summary of changes to the Hierarchy since the last Update:
 - The total score for Edenbridge has increased to match the same level as Swanley (Total Service Score 141). This is due to a number of developments being completed since the last update. However, Edenbridge does not provide a full range of services (i.e. a secondary school) or greater employment opportunities despite having good access to local services and facilities for local residents, and transport links (i.e. bus and rail). It is on this basis, and the fact that the settlement has a smaller population than Swanley, the town is designated as a “Rural Town Centre”.
 - South Darenth has moved **up** the Hierarchy since the 2009 Update. This is due to the completion of the Horton Kirby Paper Mills redevelopment, and an increase in local services and facilities. The classification for South Darenth is now “Service Village (A)”.
 - Fordcombe has moved **down** the Hierarchy since the 2009 Update. Previously, Fordcombe was designated within the “Small Villages” category. However, there appears to be a loss in the number of facilities/services that are available to serve the local need. Therefore, the classification for Fordcombe has become “Hamlet”.

A New Settlement Hierarchy for the Emerging Local Plan

- 14 A new Settlement Hierarchy will need to be produced to support the emerging Local Plan. The new report will take account of current national guidance and may be in a different form to the previous one produced for the Core Strategy. The recently updated services and facilities scores have already highlighted potential changes which could be made.
- 15 Members may wish to discuss the following options:
- The inclusion of Westerham in the “Rural Town Centre” category with Edenbridge (including Marlpytt Hill) (para. 16);
 - Keeping Otford and New Ash Green designated as “Local Service Centres” (para. 17);
 - The consolidation of “Service Villages (A) and Service Villages (B)” into one group (para. 18);
 - The consolidation of “Small Villages” and “Hamlets” into one category (para. 19).
- 16 The Settlement Hierarchy update for the AMR outlines three main settlements within the District; Sevenoaks, Swanley and Edenbridge. The revised settlement scores suggest that Westerham could be included as a main District Settlement, under “Rural Town Centre”. This is due to a number of housing sites which have been allocated within the ADMP and a large number of local facilities and services being identified (total service score of 97). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that Westerham has more in common with Edenbridge than either Otford or New Ash Green.
- 17 Otford and New Ash Green share similar levels in local facilities and services when compared to Westerham, which has a significantly higher services score. However, the individual service scores remain significantly higher than those settlements highlighted in “Service Villages”. It could be assumed that individuals use services and facilities in Otford and New Ash Green as certain facilities cannot be accessed within their own settlement (i.e. health services, libraries, other services/shops). In the ADMP, current policy affords protection to services within local service centres as the facilities provided are significant to the area and surrounding villages (ADMP Policy TLC4). It would be favourable therefore, to keep Otford and New Ash Green as “local service centres” as the services provided are significant to the area and the surrounding villages who can not access the main District settlements on a regular basis.
- 18 The Settlement Hierarchy 2015 for the AMR shows that there is currently little difference in characteristics between settlements categorised as “Service Villages”. It may be more favourable to combine the two groups “Service Villages (A) and Service Villages (B)” into one category as these settlements service surrounding smaller settlements.
- 19 Likewise, there is little difference in the level of services and facilities available in settlements classified as “Small Village” or “Hamlet”. As it would be unlikely for

these settlements to accommodate large scale developments, due to the number of services and facilities that are currently available. Therefore, it is considered favourable to combine these two categories together into one classification. However, by grouping these settlements together it does not mean that development can not occur in these locations indefinitely. Small scale developments or rural exception schemes may be permitted, subject to the normal development control processes.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

Members may choose not to consider the 2015 Update for the AMR to the Settlement Hierarchy. However, the Core Strategy and Allocations and Development Management Monitoring relies on the completion of an up to date settlement hierarchy. The Council have committed to providing up to date monitoring information to be published as part of the Authority Monitoring Report.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for the Council.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal or risk implications for the Council.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

It is important that the Council monitors the adopted policies in the Core Strategy and the Allocations and Development Management Plan. The Settlement Hierarchy update for the AMR is an important tool in determining if the policies are effective.

The Council must also produce a new Local Plan that is consistent with current national planning policy. To achieve this, a sound and up-to-date evidence base must be produced to support new local planning policies. A new Settlement Hierarchy should be produced using up to date guidance and a fresh approach to ensure it accurately reflects how sustainable development should be planned in the future.

Appendices

Appendix A – Sevenoaks District Settlement Hierarchy 2015 Update for the AMR

Background Papers:

[Sevenoaks District Settlement Hierarchy 2009](#).

Richard Morris
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