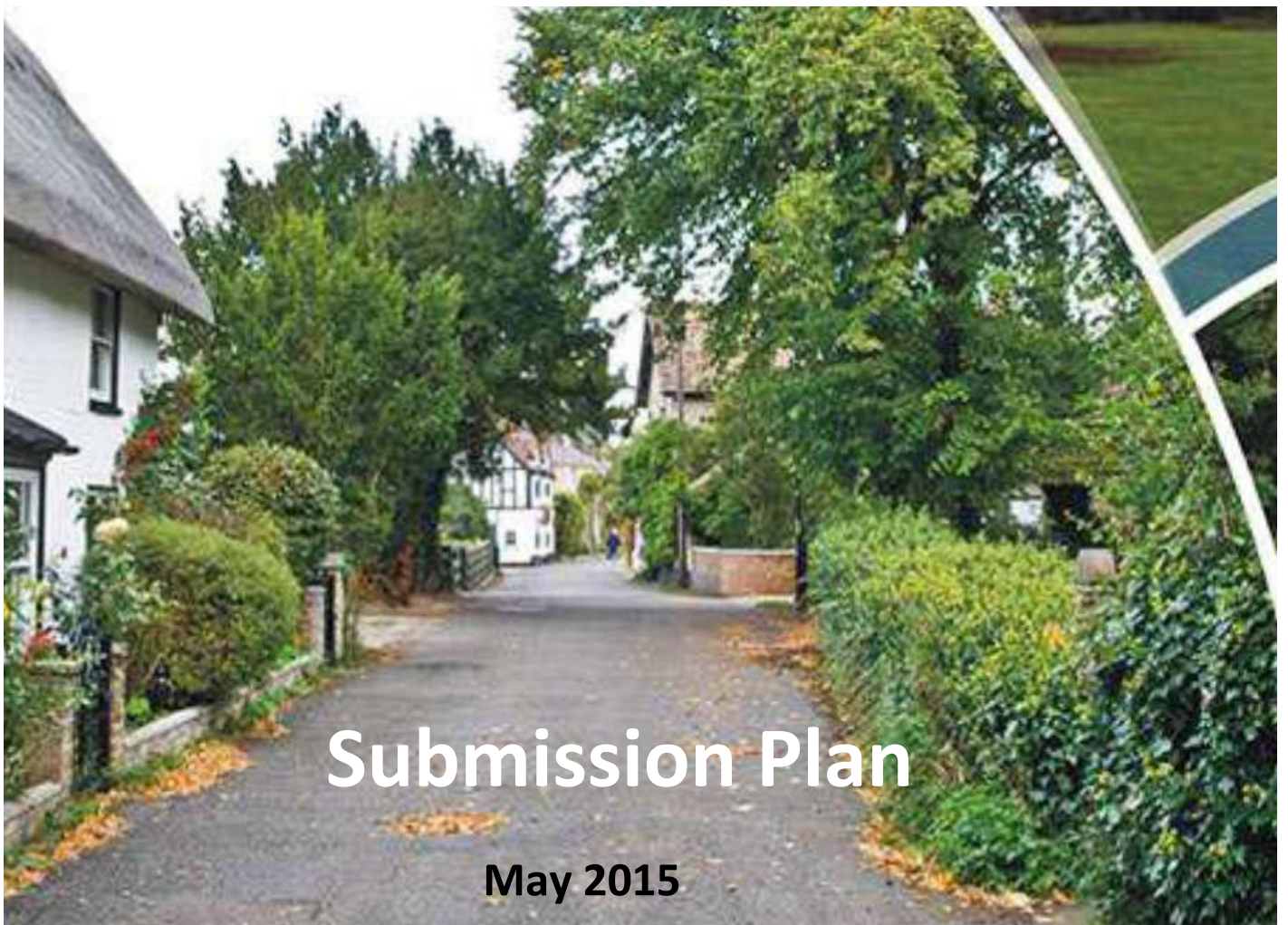




Houghton & Wyton

Neighbourhood Development Plan 2015 - 2036



Submission Plan

May 2015

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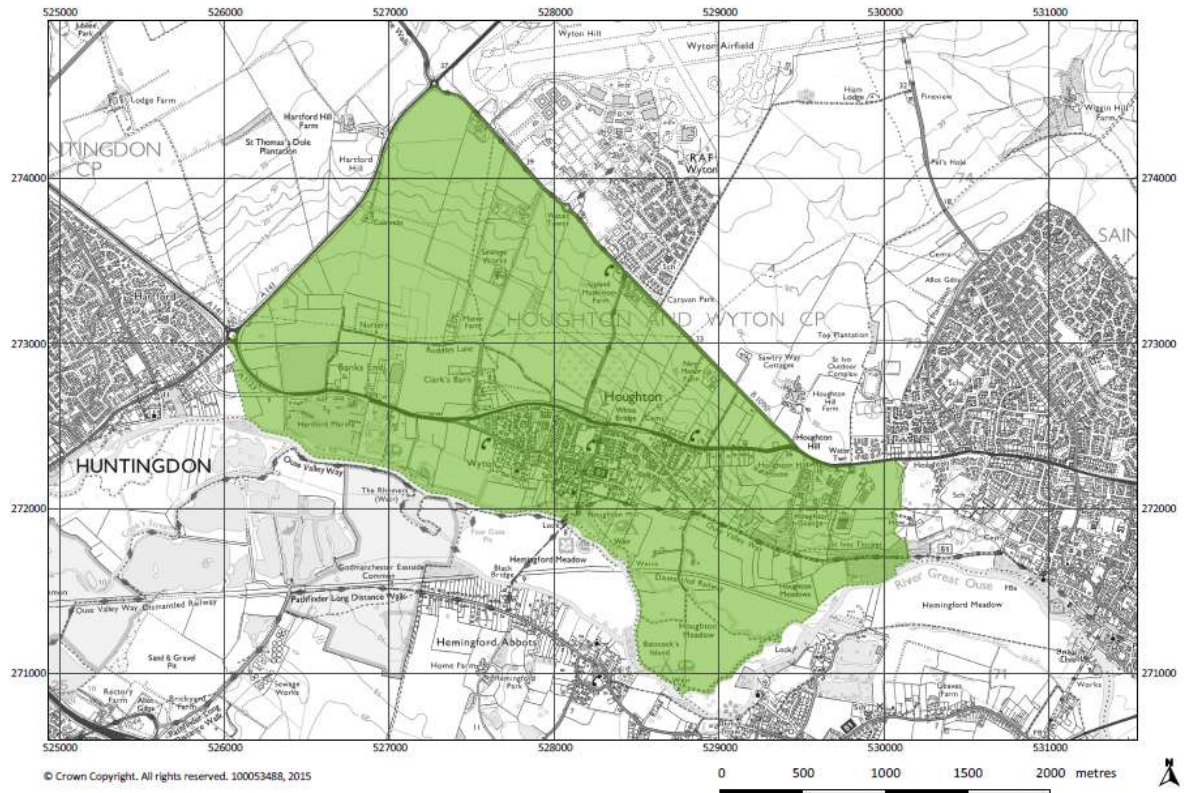
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1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This is the Neighbourhood Plan for Houghton and Wyton Parish (hereafter known as 'Houghton and Wyton'). It is a new type of planning document produced in the Parish. It is part of the Government's new approach to planning, which aims to give local people more say about what goes on in their area. This is set out in the Localism Act that came into force in April 2012.
- 1.2 The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to represent one part of the development plan for the parish over the period 2014 to 2036. For clarity, the development plan consists of any planning policies currently adopted by the local planning authority, Huntingdonshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and this Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3 The policies in this plan have been produced to be in general conformity with the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy 2009. In addition, the plan has given due regard to the emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan which, when adopted, will cover the period to 2036.
- 1.4 The Plan therefore provides the local community with a powerful tool to guide the long term future of Houghton and Wyton and its surrounding countryside for the period 2014 to 2036. The Plan gives all residents ownership of managing what happens in the community. It is not just for the Parish Council but for all. The Plan contains a vision for the future of Houghton and Wyton Parish and sets out clear planning policies to realise this vision.
- 1.5 Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development the group asked for sites to come forward as part of the process and these sites were assessed against the objectives and are shown as supporting evidence.
- 1.6 In order to develop the Neighbourhood Plan, Houghton and Wyton Parish Council set up a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group which comprised six Parish Councillors and a number of local volunteers.
- 1.7 The Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan will cover all of Houghton and Wyton Parish. In preparing the Plan, there has been dialogue with the adjoining parishes of Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey, Godmanchester, Wyton-on-the-Hill and St Ives Town Council as well as with Huntingdon District Council. An application for neighbourhood plan designation was approved by Huntingdon District Council on 19 December 2012.
- 1.8 The map in Figure 1 below shows the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan area, which is the same as the administrative boundary of Houghton and Wyton Parish.

Figure 1: Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan boundary



- 1.9 The principal purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development within the parish and provide guidance to anyone wishing to submit a planning application for development within the parish. The process of producing a plan has sought to involve the community as widely as possible and the different topic areas are reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to Houghton and Wyton, its residents, businesses and community groups.
- 1.10 Some of the Neighbourhood Plan policies are general and apply throughout the Plan area, whilst others are site or area-specific and apply only to the appropriate areas illustrated on the relevant map. Nevertheless, in considering proposals for development, the Parish and District Council will apply all relevant policies of the Plan. It is therefore assumed that the Plan will be read as a whole, although some cross-referencing between Plan policies has been provided.

How to read this document

Each section of the plan covers a different topic. Under each heading there is the justification for the policies presented which provides the necessary understanding of the policy and what it is seeking to achieve. There is also a summary of how each policy contributes towards the objectives of the plan. The policies themselves are presented in the blue boxes. It is these policies against which planning applications will be assessed. It is advisable that, in order to understand the full context for any individual policy, it is read in conjunction with the supporting text.

How the Neighbourhood Plan is organised

1.11 This Plan is divided into fourteen sections:

- Section 1: Houghton and Wyton Today; a brief description of the Parish today and the key issues that have influenced the Plan.
- Section 2: The Vision for Houghton and Wyton over the plan period.
- Section 3: Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan Objectives; this sets out what Houghton and Wyton wants to achieve over the plan period.
- Sections 4-13: Neighbourhood Plan Policies; which set out policies to support the overall vision, and the way in which the objectives will be reached, including site specific allocations for new development. Policies are arranged in the following themes:
 - Village limits/built-up area
 - Natural environment
 - Tourism
 - Community infrastructure
 - Traffic and transport
 - Flood risk and drainage
 - Business
 - Housing
 - Design of new development
 - Sites with planning permission
- Section 14: Monitoring and Community Action Plan. Since the plan is designed to improve the quality of life of people living in the parish, the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored and reviewed not only in relation to targets set out in objectives and policies but also for the impact it has on the quality of life of those living in Houghton and Wyton.

1.12 There is also a glossary of relevant terms.

2 LOCAL CONTEXT

History of Houghton and Wyton

- 2.1 Houghton and Wyton lie side-by-side on the north bank of the River Great Ouse, some two miles west of St Ives in Cambridgeshire. In 1934 the two villages were united to form the civil parish of Houghton and Wyton. The distinctive features that make the village a popular visitor destination include Houghton Mill, Houghton Equestrian Centre, Huntingdon Wyevale Garden Centre, the river Great Ouse and its flood meadows, plus the range of historic houses and cottages. In this Neighbourhood Plan Houghton and Wyton are referred to as one village.
- 2.2 A significant number of prehistoric, Iron Age and Saxon finds have been discovered in the parish and there has been a scattering of archaeological finds along Houghton Hill in the east of the parish, including stone and flint tools, a Bronze Age 'Beaker' burial and a Romano-British cemetery, indicating the presence of people here from very early times. Thicket Lane, joining the settlement with St Ives, is recorded in the Historic Environment Record as a monument. It appears that Houghton was founded during the 7th century. The name comes from 'tun' meaning enclosure, farmstead, settlement, village; 'hoh' is also old English meaning a heel, or projection of land below the crest of a hill. Together these two words as 'Hohtun' describe a settlement on a projecting hillside, a description that fits the hillside rather than the riverside settlement seen today. The village is sited around a green (which is now a tarmac area where five roads converge) which was once larger than it is now. Wyton, perhaps a century or so later in date, grew up west of Houghton along the same road and originally may have been a hamlet which developed into a fully-fledged village at a later date. The curious network of tracks known as The Lanes in Houghton is part of the old network of paths originally leading to open fields and meadows.
- 2.3 Houghton Mill is one of the last and most complete water mills to survive on the river Great Ouse. There has been a mill on the site since 974, originally belonging to Ramsey Abbey. The current mill dates from the 17th century and was extended in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is listed Grade II*. The mill ceased working in 1930, at which stage local people helped to buy it and donated it to the National Trust. It was used by the Youth Hostel Association from 1934 until 1983. Thereafter it fell into relative disrepair before work commenced in 1998 on a complete restoration project to restore the waterwheels and install a turbine. In 2012, a recycled pair of millstones was installed, driven by electricity to enable the Mill to operate all year round. The National Trust acquired the 19th century mill house in 1983 and developed a tearoom and toilets.
- 2.4 The Grade II listed Parish Church of St Mary in Houghton, mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086), is built in the Perpendicular style, mainly 14th century but with a 13th-century chancel rebuilt in 1851 and an embattled west tower with a spire containing five bells. The chancel has an elegant piscina (double stone basin) and a stone seat in early English style. The pulpit was made in 1893 from the wood of a tree from Houghton Hill House. A new stained glass window was installed to commemorate the Millennium.
- 2.5 The former Parish Church in Wyton, listed Grade I, dates from the early 13th century with a 14th-century chancel and a 19th-century north aisle.
- 2.6 The many attractive houses and cottages which border the streets and lanes of Houghton and Wyton form one of the distinctive features of the parish. The oldest surviving houses were originally yeoman farmers' homes and of timber construction. These tend to be situated on the

principal streets and basically consist of three rooms on the ground floor and three rooms above. Another style of housing to be found in the village is that of husbandmen or lesser farmers, usually found down back streets and lanes. The village also boasts some remaining examples of labourers' cottages. Within the parish there are 57 listed buildings (of which three are Grade II*).

- 2.7 With the coming of the Enclosures Act in 1773 and new farming techniques, the reliance on farming as the major source of employment began to decline, and with this many of the older houses disappeared or fell into disrepair.
- 2.8 However, from about 1840 onwards the villages became very popular, partly due to the river Great Ouse and the popularity of holidaying and spending leisure time on the river. This attracted a new style of gentry to the village who built the grand houses of the village, including Houghton Hill House, Houghton Grange, The Dingle, The Elms and Houghton Manor. During this period many earlier houses were modernized and extended, disguising their origins.
- 2.9 Wyton experienced the first post-war expansion when a small group of council houses was built at Manor Close in the 1920s. This was followed by the construction in Houghton of Hill Estate (1952) and Brookside (1966). A controversial estate of nearly 50 bungalows was later built at Victoria Crescent, gaining contemporary praise for their design. Between 1975 and 1978 three new developments were constructed on the land of Manor Farm in Wyton, these being St Margaret's Road, Loxley Green and Warren Close.
- 2.10 The Ministry of Defence sold off housing adjacent to the airfield in 2000, creating a new community. This was followed by the development of Pine Hill Park, consisting of around 50 park homes located along Sawtry Way. The village of Houghton and Wyton has expanded significantly since the 1950s, but has managed to retain its village character.

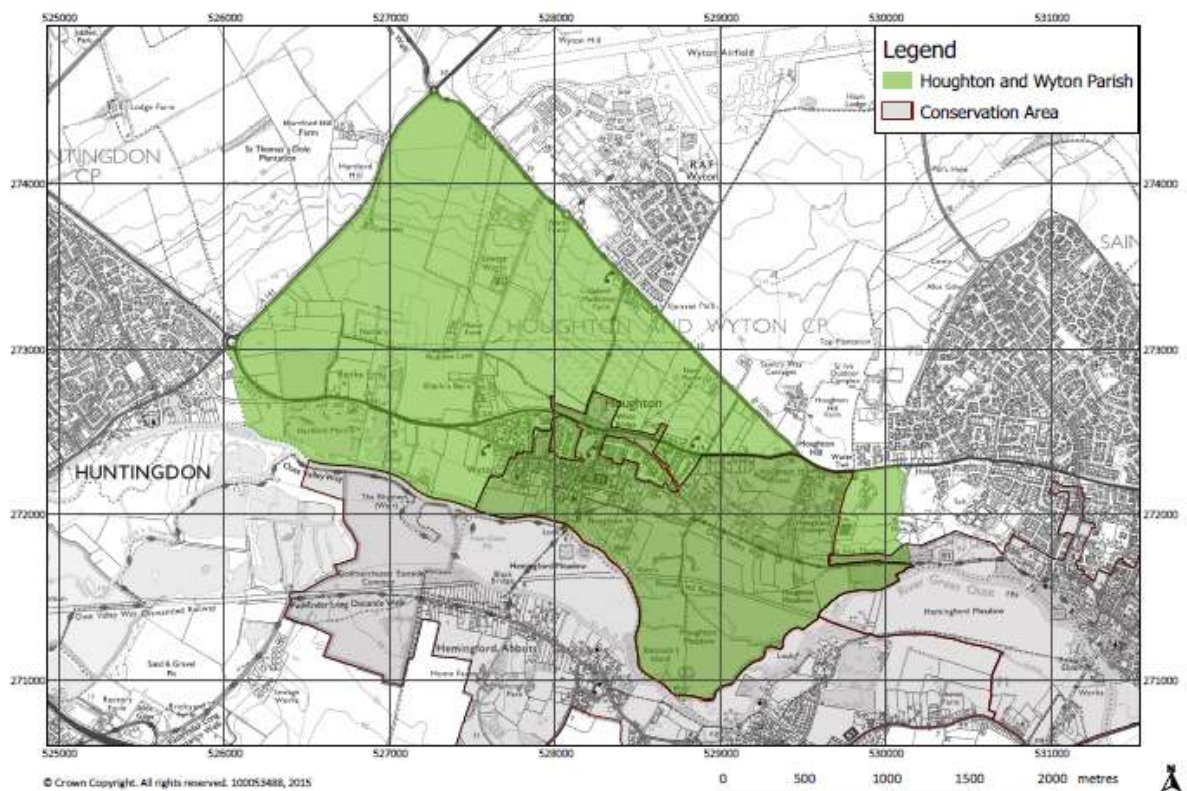
Houghton and Wyton today

- 2.11 The Parish of Houghton and Wyton is in a particularly attractive area of the Great Ouse river valley with splendid riverside meadows and the rising landscape towards the north providing a backdrop to the river views.
- 2.12 Located on the western side of East Anglia there is good road access north and south via the A1 and east and west by the A14. Huntingdon is on the East Coast main railway line with fast services to London and the north. The new guided bus has proved successful allowing improved access for residents going to Cambridge and tourists from Cambridge visiting the Parish.
- 2.13 Local services are provided by Huntingdon (with its local hospital) and St Ives, both within three miles. All major services are at Peterborough and Cambridge, twenty miles away, and include the University, Addenbrooke's and Papworth hospitals (all world class).
- 2.14 On the south side of the A1123 are Daylock Marine Services and Hartford Marina, together with its restaurant, flats and floating lodges, providing leisure activities on the river, plus holiday and permanent accommodation. On the north side of the road is the Wyevale Garden Centre, a shopping destination attracting people from a wide area. Further towards Hartford is a commercial fishing lake.
- 2.15 On the northern edge of the Parish, along the south side of Sawtry Way, is a commercial area, opposite RAF Wyton, providing local employment, and opposite Wyton-on-the-Hill is Pine Hill Park mobile homes providing low-cost housing for the over-55s, in an attractive hillside setting. Closer to St Ives is Houghton Equestrian Centre which is a high-quality facility for horse owners

and visitors and provides local employment. Nearer the village on the eastern side of Mere Way is an alpaca farm which may develop as a visitors' centre.

- 2.16 Within the village there are two pubs, two small shops, a vacant shop and a mini-supermarket which houses a Post Office. The village also boasts a successful primary school and St Mary's Church. The river provides the southern boundary and there are the navigation lock and the historic flour mill, caravan park, car park and tearooms managed by the National Trust which together form a major tourist attraction.
- 2.17 The Conservation Area boundary was re-drawn in 2012 and covers an area of considerable historic, architectural and archaeological interest, demonstrating more than a thousand years of continuous settlement.

Fig. 2 Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area



- 2.18 The parish is thus an attractive place to live and to visit and the Neighbourhood Plan aims to maintain and enhance this situation. Therefore, a wide range of topics have been considered in producing the Neighbourhood Plan.

Green spaces



- 2.19 The built-up area of the village has very little land that is not developed. The existing green spaces provide recreation opportunities, open vistas and a refuge for wildlife. They form a key aspect in the character of the village.
- 2.20 In the remainder of the Parish a large proportion of the land is agricultural which creates the rural environment in which the village sits.
- 2.21 The land that forms the green gaps between the parish and its neighbours are of particular importance.
- 2.22 Part of the parish is within the area proposed to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This reflects the natural beauty of the river valley area, the backdrops and the flood meadows.

Tourism



- 2.23 Due to its location, history and character, the parish is a popular destination for quiet tourism with an estimated 150,000 visitors per year, many of whom stay in the National Trust caravan park or local B&Bs. Visitors can enjoy the River Great Ouse and its lock and meadows, and see the flour-grinding at the historic National Trust mill. The village centre, with its attractive clock tower, provides shops and a public house for both visitors and residents.
- 2.24 Walkers can ramble across the meadows, take the village trail to view a wide range of older buildings or walk one of the varied footpaths such as the one which gently climbs up to Wyton-on-the-Hill for uninterrupted views across the Ouse Valley. Winding its way through the village, the Ouse Valley Way National Footpath provides easy walking access to St Ives, via the attractive Thicket Path, or to Godmanchester by the river, through fields and past the fishing lakes of the nature reserve. For those wishing to get on the water, the local boat hire and the marinas provide facilities for river craft and anglers, who also enjoy the local fishing lakes.
- 2.25 Tourism is therefore a major contributor to the local economy, supporting employment and business. Developments that support tourism are encouraged, but only if they do not have a negative impact on residents or the character of the area.

Leisure, recreation and community

- 2.26 The village is very active and the Houghton and Wyton Magazine, delivered free to all households, is a great success in keeping everyone informed. There are good sports facilities for football, numerous cricket teams, tennis, keep fit and bowls on the Playing Field, plus two play areas for younger children. Also located on the playing field are the Pavilion, the Scout Hut and Tennis Club hut. The Pavilion and the Memorial Hall provide indoor venues for a wide variety of clubs and organisations from pilates to the Gardening Club and cater for all ages from toddlers to the over-sixties. The school, St Mary's Church and the Chapel Retreat offer further indoor venues.



- 2.27 In early December, the clock tower, shops and pub are festooned with twinkling lights and a large Christmas tree is erected ready for the great 'switch on' by Father Christmas.



- 2.28 Feast Week takes place during the first week in July. Activities through the week have included a bowls match, an angling contest, a duck race, junior tennis, a quiz night, and a car treasure hunt. Something for everyone!



- 2.29 The end of July 2013 brought a mini music festival to the playing field. Organised by local residents, its success led to it being held again in 2014, with another planned for July 2015.

Infrastructure

- 2.30 The A1123 is one of the busiest non-arterial roads in Cambridgeshire and divides the village from the rest of the Parish to the north. Access to and from the village is arduous at busy times and could be considered dangerous at all times. The lack of pedestrian crossings reduces access to the village by other parishioners, limits the use of footpaths to the north and is one reason for the lack of stops for the guided bus. However, the serious noise pollution from the road has recently been reduced by a new quieter surface.
- 2.31 Parking in the village is limited, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day, resulting in congestion and frustration. The centre of the village is called 'The Green' and is the junction of five roads and on a through bus route. It is the heart of the village and its character must be preserved according to the Neighbourhood Plan Survey.
- 2.32 There are no public toilets in the village despite the large number of visitors.

Business



- 2.33 There are 894 economically active residents (16 to 74 years) in the parish. Of these people, 50% are employed and 12% are self-employed. In total, 25% of the population is retired. ¹
- 2.34 From the recent NP survey there are approximately 300-400 people employed in businesses located in the Parish.

Housing



| The Parish has the full range of dwelling types ² : Accommodation type | % of Total |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Detached house or bungalow | 51 |
| Semi-detached house or bungalow | 20 |
| Terraced house or bungalow | 5 |
| Flat, maisonette or apartment | 9 |
| Caravan, other mobile or temporary structure | 15 |

81% are owner occupied and the rest rented.

¹ 2011 Census

² 2011 Census

- 2.35 There are 826 households in the parish with a population of 1,817 giving an average household size of 2.2 persons. The age profile for the parish shows a low proportion (17%) aged less than 20 years compared to the district average of 24%. By contrast, the parish has a high proportion of people of retirement age – 26% compared to a district average of 16%³.
- 2.36 There is relatively little deprivation in Houghton and Wyton although 17 households reported overcrowding and 31 do not have central heating.⁴

Areas of distinctive character



- 2.37 The many attractive houses and cottages which border the streets and lanes of Houghton and Wyton form one of the distinctive features of the parish.
- 2.38 The oldest surviving houses were originally yeoman farmers' homes and of timber construction. These tend to be situated on the principal streets and basically consist of three rooms on the ground floor and three rooms above. Another style of housing to be found in the village is that of husbandmen or lesser farmers, usually found down back streets and lanes. The village boasts some remaining examples of labourers' cottages. Later houses are a mix of small bungalows, estates of semi and detached houses, larger bungalows through to large individual houses on significant plots of land.

Quality of life



- 2.39 Residents reported their health as follows (2011 census):
- Very good = 857 (47%)
 - Good = 646 (36%)
 - Fair = 245 (13.5%)
 - Bad/very bad = 3.8%

³ 2011 Census

⁴ 2011 Census

2.40 The parish provides an excellent quality of life and the maintenance of this is a priority for its residents. The recently enlarged Conservation Area recognised the importance of the special character and history of the village and the residents feel passionate about keeping this together with the preservation of the green spaces within the village and maintenance of the existing biodiversity within the parish.

2.41 This quality of life is considered to be under threat from two major and associated issues⁵:

- The continual growth of traffic on the A1123 and through the village which:
 - increases the delays and dangers of the village access points;
 - forms a barrier to the integration of the Parish to the north of the road with the village;
 - places increased pressure on parking in the village;
 - produces pollution (noise and emissions).
- Housing developments:
 - on the eastern edge which threaten the Parish's independence from St Ives;
 - piecemeal building to the west of the village which could result in a continual ribbon of development along the A1123 from St Ives to Huntingdon.

⁵ 2013 neighbourhood plan Survey

3 VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Challenges for Houghton and Wyton

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address, as far as is possible, the challenges that face the community of Houghton and Wyton. In summary these challenges are:
- **The need for increased sustainability** – in particular, reflecting the global threats of dependence on fossil fuels and imports for our basic food supply.
 - **Managing the pressure for new development** – and ensuring that the village remains as a village.
 - **Retaining the vibrancy of the retail outlets on offer** – particularly by taking advantage of opportunities to expand the shopping facilities in the village.
 - **Protecting the green spaces in and around the parish** – taking the opportunity to preserve and enhance green areas within and around the village.
 - **Retention of community assets** – recognising what these are and ensuring they are adequately protected.
 - **Improvement of facilities for community groups** – and ensuring that facilities continue to be maintained to a suitable standard to support a range of community activities.
 - **Car parking** – addressing problems in the village and the associated effects this has on the retail and services offered in the village.
 - **Addressing the housing needs of younger and older members of the community** – by ensuring that housing is developed which can provide flexibly for this range of needs.
 - **Providing appropriate employment opportunities** – particularly for small rural start-up businesses that need appropriate premises on flexible terms.
 - **Taking advantage of the tourism assets** – but in a way that ensures the additional visitors do not have a detrimental impact on the landscape, biodiversity or the quality of life of residents.
 - **Protecting and enhancing the character** – by improving the appearance of the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings in Houghton and Wyton.

Vision for Houghton and Wyton

- 3.2 The vision for Houghton and Wyton is as follows:

We are an active, thriving, dynamic and cohesive community; proud to live in this special landscape which we are keen to share with others.

- 3.3 Our vision is of a parish that continues to be centred on the single village area of Houghton and Wyton. It will maintain and develop its character and retain its separate identity and location away from other nearby settlements. Our vision is of a village which links with its surrounding areas whilst retaining the historic centre as its heart:
- Links with the rural areas to the north and south and also the vital relationship with the River Great Ouse;

- Links to the east and west, with development at Houghton Grange consolidating its role as part of the single village area, reinforced through better physical linkages and an integrated community.

Protecting the landscape

- 3.4 In order to achieve the vision, it is necessary to protect our special landscape. As the landscape along the Ouse Valley is what makes this such a special place to live and visit, efforts should be made to enhance and protect the views, and to improve and extend the existing habitats and biodiversity.

Enhancing quality of life in the community

- 3.5 Recently it has been commented upon that the people living in the parish are a “dynamic and resourceful community”. It is vital that the potential of the existing assets of the parish is maximised to further improve the quality of life of the residents. To this end it is important for residents to be connected both physically through public transport links, cycleways, bridleways, footpaths and the river, as well as electronically through maintaining and improving good broadband connections and mobile telephony. The A1123 road, with its issues of traffic volume and safety, will continue to be a main focus to improve villagers’ quality of life.
- 3.6 To develop our community further we are keen to explore opportunities that ensure the community grows stronger and more self-sufficient. For a truly sustainable community we are seeking to extend retail opportunities and improved access to public transport. If the pub and village shop were ever sold, the community has stated that it would be prepared to take over these vital village assets. We are also keen to maintain and extend the village clubs and societies and especially the playing field at the heart of the village, as these organisations and facilities form the backbone for the community.
- 3.7 At the heart of the village lies The Green, which is beginning to look tired and does need an injection of new life. Car parking in the village is a major issue for residents, shoppers and visitors alike, and solutions need to be found which avoid the heart of the village being clogged up with parked cars.
- 3.8 As an infill village for housing, our needs will be for a limited number of quality designed houses aimed at both the younger and older members of the community.

Providing appropriate employment and tourism opportunities

- 3.9 Historically, employment in the village would have relied heavily on farming. When the village and surrounding area began attracting artists at the turn of the century, catering for the needs of visitors increased in importance. Our vision is to capitalise on this special place where we live and to extend and improve the visitor experience thereby increasing employment in this sector.
- 3.10 Currently there are approximately 300–400 people employed in businesses in the parish. We wish to increase this by encouraging the development of rural and craft workshops.
- 3.11 It is estimated that there are in excess of 150,000 visitors to the village every year,⁶ whether visiting the Mill, camping, cycling or walking. We would like to see this increased along a theme of ‘quiet tourism’ which could include, for example, expanding camping/tea room facilities, extending boat hire and moorings and developing fishing lakes, horse-riding and chalets.

⁶ Over 100,000 visitors visit the National Trust Mill

Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan

3.12 The objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan, identified through engagement with the community:

| Objective | HWNP policy |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Objective 1: To protect and enhance the green spaces of importance within the parish and to restrict any further loss of grazing and agricultural land. | 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 |
| Objective 2: To protect and enhance the views identified in the conservation review (2012) that characterise the village. | 6, 7,18 |
| Objective 3: To retain the separate identity of Houghton and Wyton as a small rural village and avoid any further merging with neighbouring towns and villages. | 1, 3, 7 |
| Objective 4: To protect and enhance the range and distribution of biodiversity in the parish. | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 |
| Objective 5: To promote the growth in appropriate 'quiet tourism' in order that the beautiful countryside of the Great Ouse and meadows may be shared with visitors. | 2, 8, 9, 10, 11 |
| Objective 6: To expand existing agricultural and rural visitor facilities and attractions and develop appropriate new opportunities. | 2, 9, 10, 14, 18 |
| Objective 7: To provide accommodation for arts, crafts and leisure activities to meet the needs of the local community and visitors. | 8, 11, 17 |
| Objective 8: To support the retention of existing local services and businesses in the parish and actively encourage the development of new, small-scale businesses which benefit the community and visitors. | 10, 11, 17, 18 |
| Objective 9: To encourage the appropriate development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses. | 3, 8, 9, 10, 18 |
| Objective 10: To support small scale housing development schemes that are in keeping with the existing character of Houghton and Wyton. | 1, 2, 7, 9, 14, 15,19, 20 |
| Objective 11: To resist the loss of holiday accommodation within the parish to permanent residences. | 10 |
| Objective 12: To maintain and enhance the distinctive Character Areas of the Parish as well as protecting the conservation area and the parish's historic and listed assets. | 4, 5, 12,20 |
| Objective 13: To promote a mixed use development at Houghton Grange that can create a multi-generational community including residences suitable for the needs of people who are registered disabled. | Section 13 |
| Objective 14: Increase the provision of housing that enables older people to downsize to a dwelling size and style appropriate for their changing needs. | 19 |
| Objective 15: To ensure maximum safety to road and footway users in the parish by improving traffic flow, car parking and public transport links. | 12, 13, 14, 15 |
| Objective 16: To control infrastructure developments so that the village's open and quiet character and its varied fabric is preserved and improved, while meeting the needs of the residents. | 4, 5, 13, 16, 19, 20 |
| Objective 17: To direct vulnerable development away from areas where there is a medium or high probability of flooding. | 1, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19 |

4 VILLAGE LIMITS/BUILT UP AREA

- 4.1 The community of Houghton and Wyton has been very clear that development should be directed towards the existing built up area in the parish, namely the village. Without this plan in place there is substantial concern that Houghton and Wyton will eventually become part of an expanded St Ives to the east. This is addressed in more detail in Section 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.2 The principle of focusing development within the village is maintained by the saved policies of the 1995 Huntingdonshire Local Plan. This established the village limits of Houghton and Wyton and these have been retained in the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy.
- 4.3 The definition of built-up area from HDC Core Strategy 2009 states:

"The built-up area is the existing built form excluding:

- buildings that are clearly detached from the main body of the settlement;*
- gardens and other undeveloped land within the cartilage [sic] of buildings at the edge of the settlement, where these relate more to the surrounding countryside than they do the built-up parts of the village; and*
- agriculture buildings where they are on the edge of the settlement"*

The Emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan elaborates on the definition within the Core Strategy 2009.

The Relationship Between Built-up Areas and the Countryside

Where a proposal is subject to a policy that makes use of the concepts of the 'built-up area' and the 'countryside' the following definitions will be applied.

Built-up Areas

A built-up area is defined as a distinct group of 30 or more homes and their immediate surroundings. Built-up areas exclude:

- a. gardens, paddocks, agricultural land and other undeveloped land in the curtilage of buildings where it relates more to the surrounding countryside than to the built-up area of the settlement;*
- b. outdoor sports and recreation facilities, other formal open spaces and agricultural buildings on the edge of the settlement.*

Settlements defined in LP 3 'Spatial Planning Areas', LP 4 'Service Centres' and LP 5 'Small Settlements' all have at least one built-up area. Where settlements comprise more than one distinct group, each will be treated as a separate built-up area. A settlement may extend into part of another parish, in such cases it will be considered as a single built-up area.

Development sites will be considered to be part of the built-up area once the whole site, or phase (for large scale major developments), is completed.

Countryside

The countryside includes all land outside built-up areas and includes those hamlets, groups of buildings and individual buildings that are clearly detached from a built-up area that are not themselves large enough to be defined as a built-up area.

The Countryside is considered to offer only very limited and specific opportunities for sustainable development. A development proposal located in the countryside will be expected to comply with policy LP 6 'The Countryside' and other applicable policies."

The emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan creates a policy for building in the Countryside:

A proposal for development in the countryside should:

- a. demonstrate how it would protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside;*
- b. not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the enjoyment of the countryside by others;*
- c. not lead to the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1) and should use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value; and*
- d. support the vitality and viability of the rural economy or support a rural community.*

There are limited and specific opportunities for development in the countryside which are set out in other policies of this plan.

4.4 New homes in the countryside will require special justification for planning permission to be granted. However, certain types of development that provide support to the role of the countryside are considered to be necessary. In particular, development which provides support to ongoing rural and tourism uses will generally be supported, subject to appropriate design to minimise any impact on the special landscape of the parish. Other proposals located in the countryside will be expected to demonstrate that there are clear sustainability benefits for the proposal being located there. Sustainability benefits will depend on the use or uses proposed and how the proposal complies with applicable policies of this plan and the NPPF.

4.5 This approach is supported by the Neighbourhood Plan. In order to underpin this approach and the spatial strategy informing it, the built-up area is defined by the A1123 to the north of the built-up area, so for the avoidance of confusion north of the A1123 is not included in the built-up area. Houghton Grange development forms a natural edge to the settlement to the east, and the flood plain and the river form natural boundaries to the south and the western edge. The built-up area ends where Huntingdon Road joins the A1123. The natural boundaries of the built-up area are indicated in Figure 4.1 below.

4.6 It is also important that the development strategy recognises the significant threat of flooding in the Neighbourhood Plan area. The strategy for growth is predicated on directing 'less vulnerable', 'more vulnerable' or 'highly vulnerable' development from flood zones 2 and 3, as advised by the Environment Agency and set out in Planning Practice Guidance. This includes residential development within the village limits/built up area where it is in flood zones 2 or 3.

Figure 3: Indicative built-up area of Houghton and Wyton



Policy

Policy HWNP1 - Houghton and Wyton village limits/built up area

There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the built up area which shall be guided by the relevant Neighbourhood Plan policies and other policies in the development plan.

Outside the built up area any development is considered to represent development in the open countryside. Such development will be acceptable if it represents a use that supports rural activities or quiet tourism.

Across the neighbourhood plan area, there shall be a presumption against all types of vulnerable new development being located in flood zones 2 and 3. This shall include such development within the built-up area.

Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP1

1,3,10,17

5 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Policy justification

- 5.1 The NPPF recognises the local ecological networks and the hierarchy of designated sites. This policy seeks to recognise all the designated areas and welcomes developments that enhance connectivity creating wildlife corridors.
- 5.2 A proposal for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the Great Ouse Valley and Washes is currently being considered by Natural England. The Great Ouse Valley is recognised as an area of green enhancement in the emerging HDC Local Plan.
- 5.3 Within the parish there is a nationally recognised Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - Houghton Meadow - as well as important habitats recognised as County Wildlife Sites (CWS). There are several areas of common land which it is appropriate to protect from development. The purpose of these policies is to highlight those sites already designated and to provide a level of protection for non-statutory areas such as CWS. It aims to prevent harm through the direct and indirect impacts of development.
- 5.4 The Lawton Review concluded in 2014 that the protection of wildlife sites in isolation was not sufficient to protect England's biodiversity. The review identified the need for establishing a coherent ecological network that is more resilient to current and future pressures, which can be achieved by creating bigger wildlife sites of better quality which are better connected.

Figure 4: Map of SSSIs, CWS

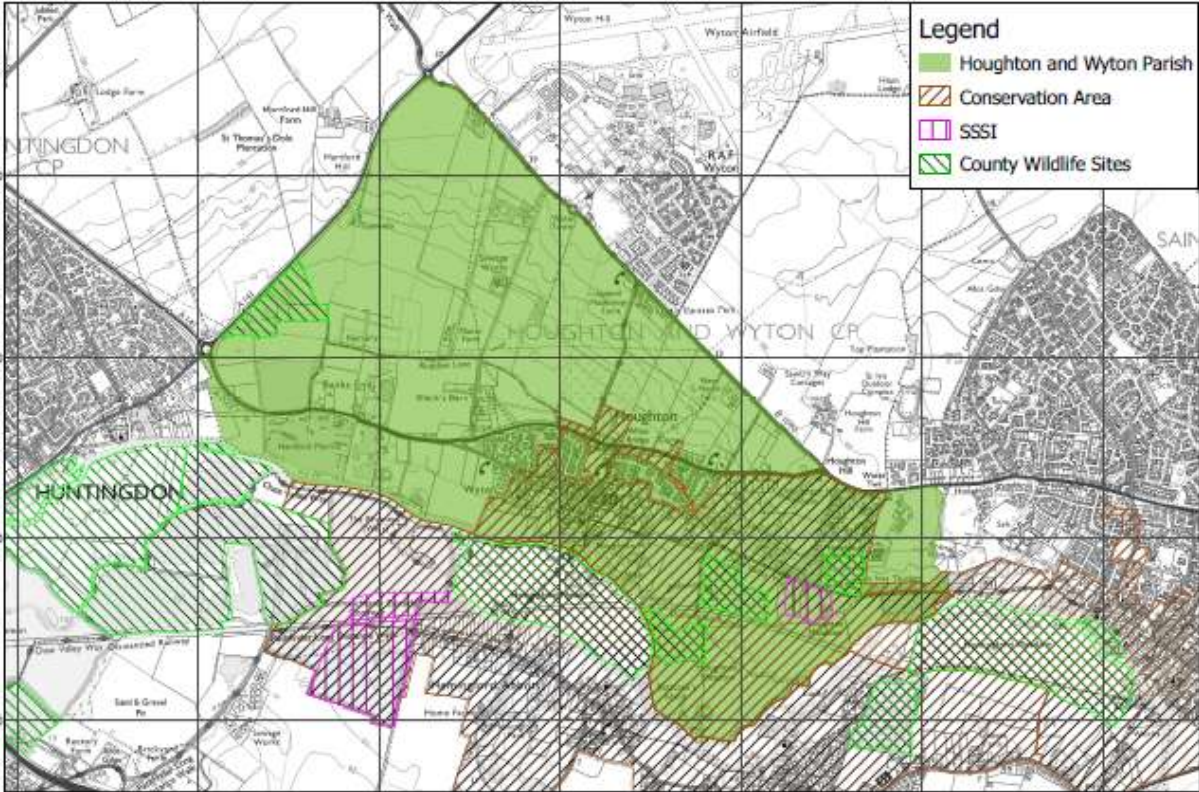
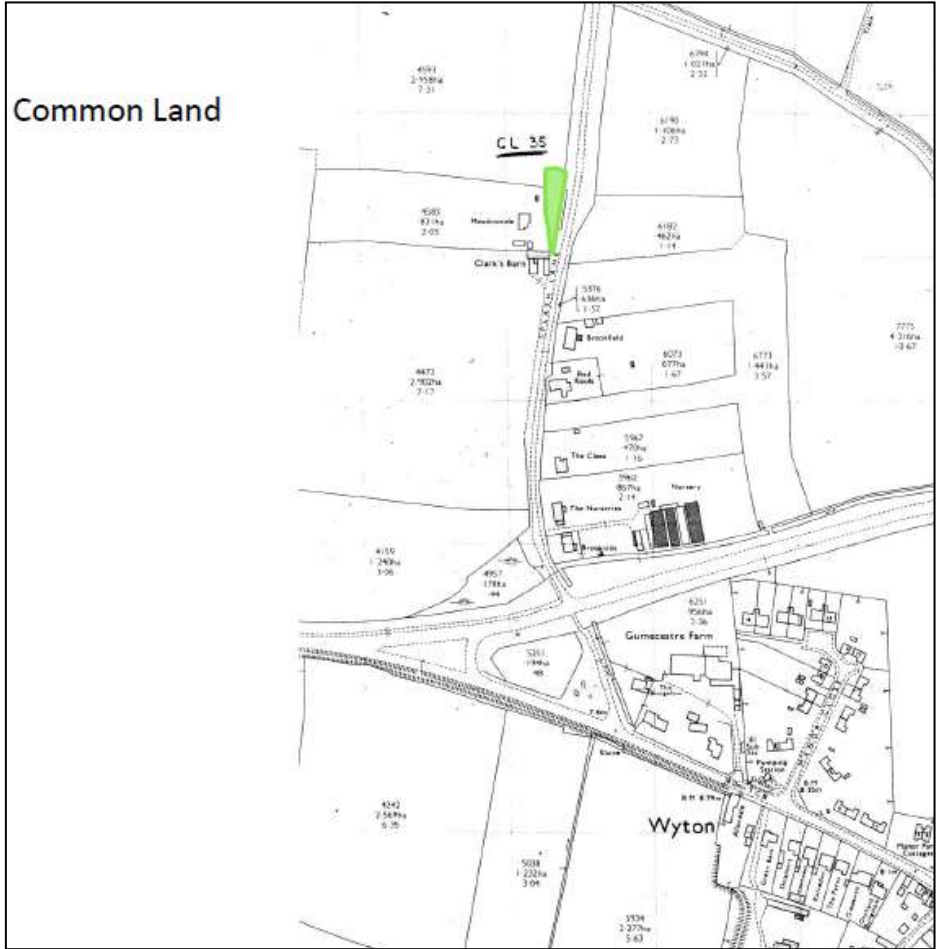


Figure 5: Common land along the A1123 including the historic village pond



Figure 6: Common land along Splash Lane, Wyton



Policy

Policy HWNP2 - Protection of sites
 Planning applications for development which would result in an adverse impact on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), County Wildlife Sites (CWS) or common lands would only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
 Development that provides opportunities to enhance habitats and extend the wildlife sites and create better connectivity between them will be viewed positively.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP2 | 1, 4, 5, 6, 10 |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|

Local Settlement Gap

- 5.5 This policy seeks to protect the village character and distinctiveness by retaining and enhancing a clear and obvious open land gap between the village and neighbouring town of St Ives. The importance to the community of the existing gap between the eastern edge of Houghton and Wyton the western edge of St Ives is currently very significant as evidenced through the funding of a court case, a petition of over 700 signatures and many letters to the District Council on the subject as well as the Neighbourhood Plan surveys and consultations.

Policy justification

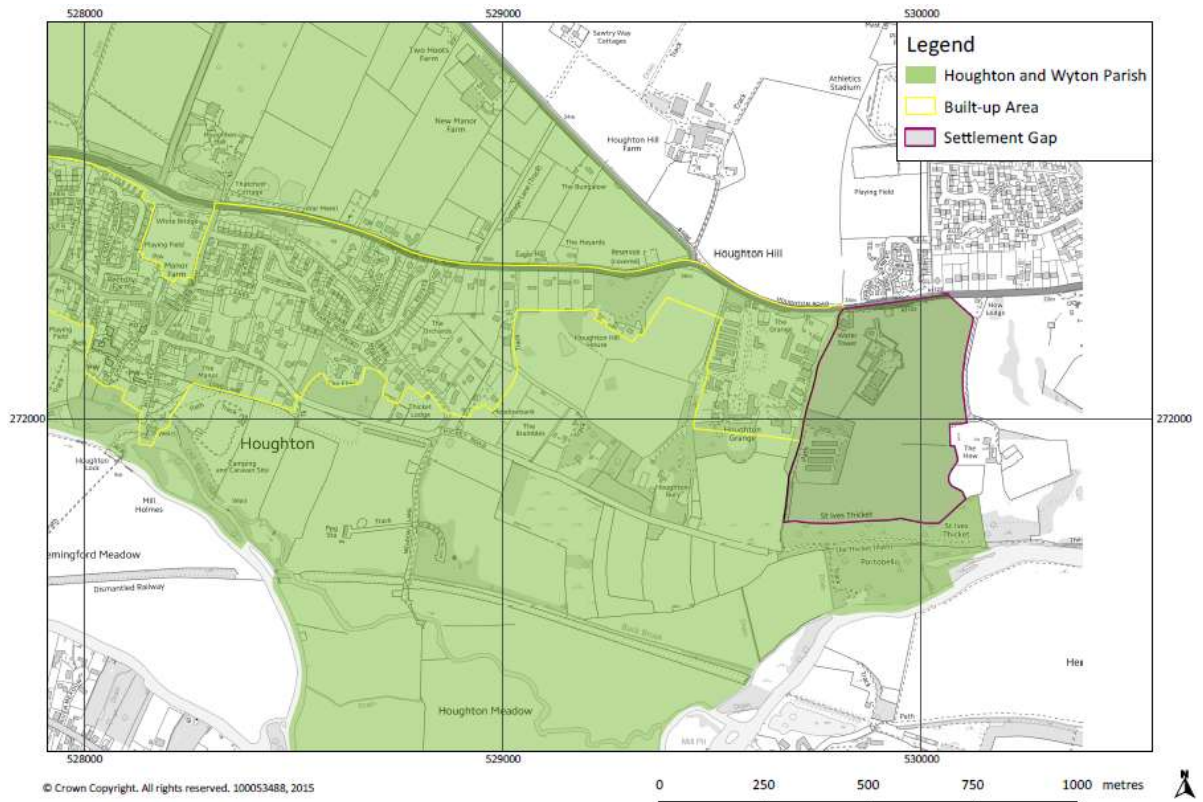
- 5.6 It is the opinion of the community of Houghton and Wyton that, with the growth of neighbouring St Ives, such assimilation would not be possible without totally destroying the historic character of the parish and the settlements. This view has been confirmed by previous inspectors of HDC Local Development plans who have stated that this gap is "vital" and that it must be "retained". This is largely due to Houghton and Wyton's setting within the proposed Great Ouse Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 5.7 The Huntingdonshire Core Strategy proposes in Policy CS2 "a significant greenfield development to the west of the town" as part of the St Ives Spatial Planning Area which did not extend beyond the old St Ives Golf Course site. The emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan provides more detail, proposing the allocation of land for a strategic mixed use development to the west of St Ives. This would incorporate a section of land within the eastern extremity of the parish, including Houghton Grange, which would remove the physical gap between town and village unless the definition was tightened. This proposal has considerable opposition and whilst alternative sites have come forward it is too early in the local plan process to know the outcome.

Policy

Policy HWNP3 – Local Settlement gap

Within the identified settlement gap, development will not be permitted if it would add to existing sporadic or isolated development or lead to the coalescing of the village with the neighbouring town of St Ives, in turn leading to the loss of the individual identity of Houghton and Wyton.

Figure 7: Local Settlement Gap



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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP3 | 1, 3, 4, 9 |
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Local Green Spaces

- 5.8 The Huntingdonshire Core Strategy recognises the importance of the Ouse Valley as an identified area of green space enhancement. Natural England are currently assessing the Great Ouse Valley as a new Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Much of the parish is within the setting of the proposed AONB. Development will be supported which recognises the importance and enhancement of the setting of Houghton and Wyton
- 5.9 As part of the Neighbourhood Plan process, the community was asked to consider if there were any important green open spaces of value in the Parish. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect these where appropriate.

Policy justification

- 5.10 Under the NPPF, Neighbourhood Plans have the opportunity to designate Local Green Spaces which are of particular importance to them. This will afford protection from development other than in very special circumstances. Paragraph 77 of the NPPF says that Local Green Spaces should only be designated:

- *"where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*

- where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land."

5.11 Whilst the village has seen some development during the second half of the twentieth century, it retains a number of green spaces that contribute to its character and provide opportunities for informal and formal recreation. This policy wishes to see the most important of these spaces protected for future generations.

Figure 8: Map of Local Green Spaces



- **Houghton and Wyton Playing Field** - because of its recreation value. Lying in the heart of the village with boundaries abutting Victoria Crescent, St Ives Road and the A1123, this provides a place for both formal and informal recreation. The field was given in trust to the village and is currently part owned by the Parish Council, which purchased their share in 1962, and the Eastgate Trust. The Playing Field is home to the village football, cricket teams, the village bowls, tennis and keep fit. The Pavilion and Scout Hut sit on the field, providing a venue for all Scouts and Guides as well as being available for hire. The field also hosts significant events within the village calendar – Feast Week and the Music Festival, as well as many other one-offs and charity fundraising events. It is a meeting place, dog-walking and social recreation place for the village. There is a car park for users of the playing field.



- **The Elms, Thicket Road** – The garden forms a natural setting to The Elms and is renowned for the snowdrops and aconites planted by George William Brown, son of Potto Brown. Indeed galanthophiles have been known to wander through the gardens. The wellingtonia trees are equally important for their value to wildlife (foxes, muntjac, badgers, bats, bird species) and the enjoyment of those who walk down the Thicket. There is a Saxon burial mound within the grounds.



- **BBSRC field (the field between Houghton Grange and The How)** – for its historic value. The BBSRC field sits on the edge of the built-up area of the village between Houghton Grange and the edge of the old St Ives Golf Course.

It forms an integral part of the Houghton Grange estate and gardens (a Grade II-listed property specifically mentioned in Pevsner's Architectural Guide to Cambridgeshire), a part of which already falls within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area.

The land has a rich history. It was originally one very large estate owned by the Ansley family, and the creation in the mid- to late-19th and early 20th centuries of a number of smaller estates with large houses and gardens – namely Houghton Hill House, Houghton Bury (all Grade II-listed) and The How (not listed) and the former Golf Course. The gardens and park land of these houses are well-wooded with many mature and specimen trees; the planting of conifers amongst native and other deciduous trees is a particular feature, identifying it from afar as a collection of designed landscapes. The position, design and building of the houses are all tied up with power, politics, significant local business people and religious feuding. However, the common theme throughout all of this social history has been the appreciation of the uniqueness and rare beauty of the Houghton Hill landscape.

The whole hillside is a significant and unique topographical feature in the area – the only hill for miles around. It provides a 'backdrop' setting to the meadows and river.

Historical literature about the area makes this point very clearly:

Gleanings in England and Wales and Holland - Samuel Jackson Pratt, 1801:

"The view from the Bridge as you enter St.Ives from London or Cambridge, opens a scene of beauty that commands attention. From thenceextending your walk along the Thicket, and then mount the little hillock – suffer me in modesty, to call it, midway betwixt Houghton and St.Ives – you will be rewarded by as rich and varied a display of what might be termed the softness of natural beauty, that a flat country has to exhibit. The admired steeple of St.Ives and Hemingford, the pure river winding before you, the anglers on the willow shaded banks, the clack of the watermill, the mill house, the playful variety of green unfolding the diversity of autumn, many hundreds of acres of the richest meadow ground covered with herds, the town of St.Ives with western sun gilding it, constitute a group of objects which even a Lutherburg [Phillip James de Louthembourg, RA 1740-1812. An early Romantic painter especially known for his landscapes] might think worthy of his pencil, and consider a sketch of these softnesses of nature a relief from more inspiring scenery.

In a word, it is scarcely possible, on an almost entire, flat, from an eminence of just height enough to display its beauties – without being lofty enough to look scornfully down on them – to see a more agreeable prospect in any part of England."

History of St Ives – Herbert E Norris, 1888

"The view from the bridge taking in a broad glance of the river, the distant church spire, and the background of the Thicket tress, is indeed charming."

Rural Rides – William Cobbett, 1822

Through Ware and Royston to Huntingdon, January 1822

"Above and below the bridge under which the Ouse passes, are the most beautiful, and by far the most beautiful meadows that I ever saw in my life. The meadows at Lewis, at Guildford, at Farnham, at Winchester, at Salisbury, at Exeter, at Gloucester, at Hereford and even Canterbury, are nothing, compared with those of Huntingdon in point of beauty..... the valleys terminate at the foot of rising ground, well set with trees, from amongst which church spires raise their heads here and there. I think it would be very difficult to find a more delightful spot than this in the world."

And as described in 'The Village of Houghton and Wyton' by Philip Dickinson - *"where the river has cut back the hills, the scene is dramatic and impressive, quite unlike anywhere else in the county, and the land falls sharply to the Thicket path."*

Nowhere else along the Great Ouse between St Neots and Kings Lynn does the river lie so close to a hillside with (albeit fairly modest in Kent or Surrey terms) hanging woods. The

BBSRC field is a key component of the Houghton Hillside which together with the meadows between St Ives and Houghton is appreciated as the most beautiful part of the whole Ouse Valley. It is 'the jewel in the crown'.

The hill forms an essential part of the backdrop setting to St Ives and the ancient monument of the old Town Bridge (1006865) as well as to the Grade I-listed buildings in the St Ives and Hemingfords Conservation Areas: St Ives Parish Church, Hemingford Grey Church, Hemingford Grey Manor House and Hemingford Abbots Church.

And, likewise, the Grade II*-listed buildings: The New Bridges, St Ives; Hemingford Grey House; River House, Hemingford Grey.

All these buildings are situated along the river and enjoy views across to the Houghton hillside.

The Historic Gardens Trust has commented that the best view and appreciation is from a distance. "Look north across the river from Hemingford on a winter's day and you are immediately struck by the coniferous tree-scape on Houghton Hill – over a stretch of about one and a half miles the collection of magnificent pines, cedars and Wellingtonias is evidence of the fashions and passions of those Victorian and Edwardian gardeners."

These views complement and make a valuable additional asset to the Conservation Area and form part of the AONB designation currently being considered by Natural England.

HDC officers have historically classified this field as part of an 'Area of Best Landscape' and recognised and documented the significance of the views in and out, even stating that the views from the site must become an integral part of the public realm⁷.

The HDC Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Development Management Panel and Cabinet⁸ have all recommended that at the appropriate time, the field (or part of) should be considered for inclusion within the Houghton and Wyton Conservation Area and that it could '*seek to deliver the aspirations for public open space in the Conservation Area*'.

The Planning Policy Officer of Cambridgeshire County Council would welcome proposals to include the medieval field systems and grounds of the country house estates on Houghton Hill as this will "strengthen landscape/scale biodiversity benefits within the three contiguous conservation areas of Houghton, Hemingford's and St Ives thereby helping fulfil biodiversity duties under the natural Environmental and Rural Communities Act 2006". She also states that any "preservation/enhancement would further strengthen the landscape connectivity across this area"⁹.

In addition to the historical importance and beauty, the BBSRC field has a community significance as providing a buffer between the parish and the town of St Ives. The evidence for this is considerable from the village-wide surveys conducted for the Parish Plan in 2009; a petition of 723 names handed in to the District Council in 2012; the raising of many thousands of pounds to challenge and win a High Court case in 2013 when this field was

⁷ Section 4.1.6.5 St. Ives West Urban Design Framework 2011

⁸ Overview & Scrutiny (Environmental Well-Being) 13.11.12; Development Management Panel 19.11.12; Cabinet Committee 22.11.12

⁹ Conservation Boundary Review Consultation July 2012

illegally specified as a development site¹⁰; through to extensive consultation for this document. The community has recognised the importance that this field occupies in retaining Houghton and Wyton's individual identity and character.

Policy

Policy HWNP4 - Protection and maintenance of Local Green Spaces

In recognition of their value to the local community, the following areas are designated as Local Green Spaces and will be strongly protected from development:

- Houghton and Wyton Playing Field
- The gardens of the Elms, Thicket Road
- BBSRC field (the field between Houghton Grange and The How)

These Local Green Spaces are shown on the map in Figure 4.3.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP4 | 1, 4, 12, 16 |
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Verges and Greens

Policy justification

5.12 The verges and greens are important because they contribute towards the village's character and distinctiveness. They also perform a biodiversity function, being a place where various species thrive. It is therefore important that the most significant of these greens and verges are protected. These are:

- Ware Lane verge by the side of Loxley Green - is to be managed for wildflowers which attract pollinators.



- The verges down the Thicket and in front of the Manor, The Gardens and Rose Cottage – whilst this might seem unnoticed, they are very much appreciated by residents and visitors as a contribution to village's open space character.

¹⁰ Houghton & Wyton Parish Council v Huntingdonshire District council The High Court of Justice May 2013.



- Wildflower garden off Victoria Crescent - cleared of rubbish and planted in the mid-1990s - it is important to maintain this area for wildlife.



- The green spaces in St Margaret's Road and Home Farm Road - the green areas amidst the housing developments provide a breathing space and a place for trees to develop for all to enjoy.



- The Green at Hill Estate has provided informal recreation for both children and adults since the estate was built in 1952. The open space provides a green oasis for trees to develop and has been enjoyed in what would be an enclosed housing area.



- The Green at Loxley Green (between Huntingdon Road and Ware Lane). When the main farm in the parish, Manor Farm, sold land and outbuildings to make way for the mixed housing in Loxley Green between 1975 and 1978, the Green was part of the old track to the farmhouse and maintains some fine old trees. It is used for informal play and street parties today.



- The Green in Warren Close is a small development of alternatively designed housing built between 1975 and 1978. The central green was once a pond and still retains the original willow trees that used to surround the pond. The pond was thought to be the remnants of a moat which once encircled an earlier house.



- The village pond and surrounding perimeter on the A1123 has been common land for the village and contains an ancient pond providing important habitat for dragonfly and amphibian species.



- Thicket Footpath – from the bridge at Thicket Road/Meadow Lane crossroads, down to Portabello Wood, the verge on the right hand side. This footpath is an ancient footpath said to have been used by Oliver Cromwell on his journey between home and school. The verge all along the right hand side provides a wild beauty and gives the path a very rural feel.



- The field on the corner of Thicket Road and Meadow Lane demonstrates ridge and furrow and provides the transition from the built environment to the open countryside and a sense of tranquillity towards the edge of the village.



- The National Trust car park and camp site is located at the end of Mill Street, near the mill on the backwater of the River Great Ouse. The camp site has been present since the 1960s, initially targeted at anglers but then recognising the attraction for families and children to be able to play in the open fields. Under new ownership in the 1980s, a designated car park was established on the ridge and furrow field. Over 200 trees were planted in the 1980s which now provide a tranquil backdrop to the mill as well as creating habitat for the associated wildlife. The car park and camp site were taken into the National Trust ownership in 1998. This now provides a valuable parking space for visitors to the village.



- The triangle at the crossroads of Huntingdon Road and A1123 is known locally as The Splash. Historically this green space has been used for agricultural purposes. It now provides an important visual amenity for the village entrance with its copse of trees. It is planned to be a community space which will include the planting of fruit trees to make a community orchard. The original Splash pond is important in managing the potential flood risk from the ditch nearby.



- Splash Lane - the verge on the left hand side as you travel up Splash Lane from the A1123 must be sensitively managed and will be planted with trees and shrubs to screen the housing as you approach the village from the west. The verge further up on the right hand side is also important and needs to be managed as it is on the edge of the countryside and should the rural part of the village.



- Rectory Lane - in front of the old church (Grade I-listed) there is already the cover for a septic tank, but the space needs sensitive management to ensure it remains a tree-inspired green space.



- Brookside - the triangle in front of the bungalows provides an important vista for the bungalows and it should be ensured it does not become a car park.



- Corner of Leslie Green Road and Meadow Lane - the verge from Brookside up Leslie Green Road on the right-hand side is important for the trees and shrub cover and needs to be managed for wildlife.



- In front of Manor Close - the two areas of green space either side of Manor Close entrance provide a green space to allow trees and bulbs to grow.



5.13 The currently identified greens and verges will need to be subject to a separate management plan, to be drawn up by the Parish Council in partnership with the relevant authority.

Policy HWNP5 – Greens and verges

Development which protects and enhances the greens and verges in the built-up area of the parish shall be supported.

The Parish Council will work in partnership with the landowners

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP5 | 1, 4, 12, 16 |
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Biodiversity

- 5.14 Houghton and Wyton contain a large area of floodplain meadows, some of which is designated but the majority of which is impoverished from a biodiversity perspective. There has been a significant loss of species-richness in the riverside meadows. A key objective for the Ouse Valley area of greenspace enhancement is the restoration of species-rich floodplain meadows.
- 5.15 The aim of this policy is to:
- protect the existing biodiversity assets of the parish;
 - enhance the number and range of species, especially those species on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) lists;
 - create new woodland;
 - improve wildlife corridors to create better connectivity
 - manage hedgerows appropriately; and
 - work with farmers to minimise the damage to biodiversity through their actions.

Policy justification

- 5.16 Paragraph 109 of the NPPF states that “the planning system should minimise impacts on biodiversity...by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures”.
- 5.17 It goes on to state at paragraph 117 that, “to minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, planning policies should promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations”.
- 5.18 The Huntingdonshire Core Strategy recognises the importance of biodiversity and in particular the sensitive nature of the Great Ouse Valley. Policy CS9 which seeks to create new green infrastructure specifically identifies the need for coordinated action to create new wildlife habitats to increase biodiversity.
- 5.19 The lowland hay meadows are characterised by species-rich swards, including great burnet, meadowsweet, meadow buttercup, yellow rattle and lady’s bedstraw, and at Houghton Meadow, down the Thicket, it is recorded that the scarce green-winged orchid is present. The great-crested newt has been recorded at Houghton Hill.
- 5.20 The banks of the river and its backwaters are characterised by willows and avenues of black poplar hybrids.
- 5.21 The river Great Ouse is important for eels, spined loach, tommy ruffe and otter. Many dragonfly and damselfly species are also present.
- 5.22 The sound of skylarks, warblers and nightingales is to be heard in spring and summer and migrating geese are to be seen and heard in autumn.

Policy

Policy HWNP6 – Retaining and enhancing biodiversity

Development will be expected to retain and enhance well-established features of the landscape, and biodiversity assets including the species-rich meadows and the biodiversity assets of the River Great Ouse. If there is significant loss of biodiversity as part of development, then new provision will be expected to be made elsewhere on the site.

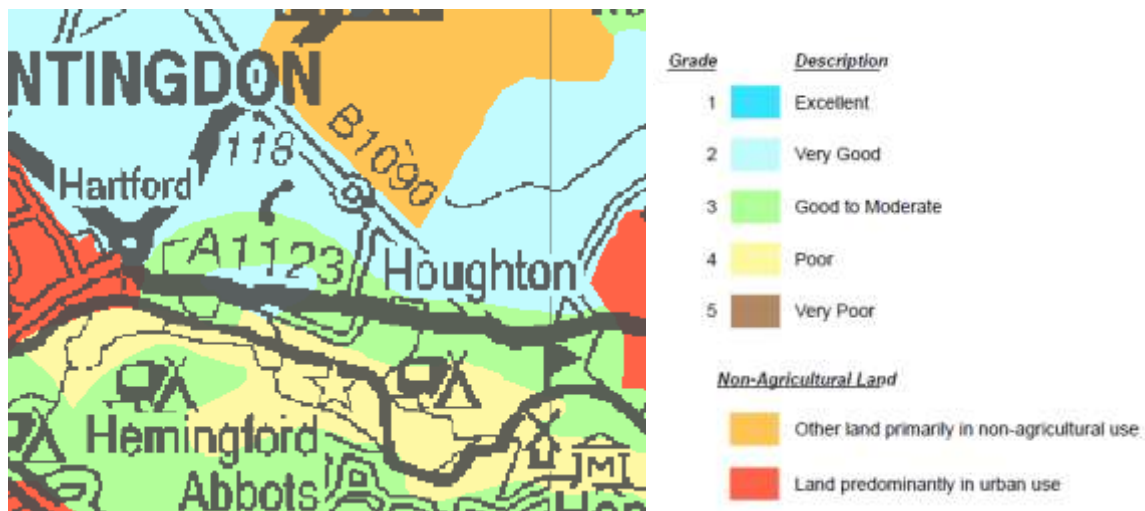
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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP6 | 1, 2, 4 |
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Protection of agricultural and grazing land

Policy Justification

- 5.23 The history of the parish is intertwined with farming and with cattle grazing before going to market at St Ives. Indeed the Splash on the A1123 was the watering stop for cattle travelling to market. With the loss of all the farms within the settlement has come the loss of grazing and agricultural land.
- 5.24 Figure 5.5 shows the agricultural classification of land in the parish. This shows that there is a significant amount which is classed as Grade 2 (very good) with a proportion that is also Grade 3 (good to moderate).

Figure 9: Agricultural Land Classification



Source: Natural England, 2008

5.25 Paragraph 112 of the NPPF states:

"Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality."

5.26 Paragraph 143 of the NPPF goes on to refer to the importance of "safeguarding the long term potential of best and most versatile agricultural land".

5.27 It is therefore considered that, in order to maintain some grazing for the existing landowners (alpacas, Houghton beef, goats) and to protect land in use for the growing of crops, there will be a presumption against development which reduces grazing and agricultural land.

5.28 Policy HWNP6 therefore seeks to ensure that Grade 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land – outside of the allocated sites – can only be brought forward for development if it can be demonstrated that it has not recently been in agricultural use and has little prospect of being brought back into productive use in the near future. The land must not have been farmed for at least two years, a period intended to ensure that speculative applications for development of high quality agricultural land are avoided, whilst at the same time still providing an opportunity for agricultural land that clearly has no prospect of re-use to come forward and address any additional needs over the short term (i.e. the next five years).

Policy

Policy HWNP7 – Protection of best and most versatile agricultural land

Development of best and most versatile agricultural land (as defined in national policy) will be refused unless it can be demonstrated that:

- there is no other land of lower agricultural quality in the parish that is capable of being sustainably developed; and
- there will be significant sustainability benefits that arise from development which outweigh the benefits of retaining the land in its existing agricultural use.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP7 | 1, 2, 3,4,10 |
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6 TOURISM

Tourism development

Policy justification

- 6.1 One of the key themes in the NPPF is supporting a prosperous rural economy. Within this it recognises the importance of tourism as part of that. Paragraph 28 states that neighbourhood plans should:

"...support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres."

- 6.2 Visitors to Houghton and Wyton are attracted to the National Trust Houghton Mill, Houghton Equestrian Centre, Wyevale Garden Centre, the River Great Ouse, and the many walks and cycleways around the countryside and village. This tourism is one which respects the sensitive nature of the environment, in particular the species-rich meadows and the landscape stretching along the Ouse Valley.
- 6.3 Such 'quiet tourism' should be welcomed, recognising the economic benefits it brings to the local and wider community. The mantra of quiet tourism is, "Take only photographs, leave only footprints".
- 6.4 Examples of the types of tourism which are acceptable include:
- Foot/cycle paths which, where they improve access to the parish, are safe and as long as no deterioration is caused to the environment.
 - Mooring or marine establishments on the waterways which conform to the environmental criteria identified elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan.
 - Activities which do not cause harm to the network of protected habitats and landscapes.
- 6.5 The following indicates examples where changes to the tourism enhancement would not be acceptable because they would not accord with the principles of quiet tourism:
- Trail/dirt bike tracks.
 - Large, regular music festivals.
 - River racing using high-volume motor boats, river water-skiing and wake-boarding.
 - Unauthorised camping/trailer sites.
- 6.6 Temporary activities may be considered appropriate, but the location where the activities occur should be left in a condition as was originally seen and the natural habitat should in no way be affected by pollution or excessive noise.
- 6.7 The purpose of these policies is to attract day and residential visitors so that they can experience the beauty of the landscape, the agriculture, rural activities and attractions which help the parish develop economically through the creation of jobs and visitor spend. This must be balanced with the need to ensure that tourism development is appropriate and does not have a detrimental impact on the quality of life of the community.

Policy HWNP8 – Tourism development

The development and expansion of tourism facilities, attractions and activities connected with day and residential visitors will be supported where the following criteria can be met:

- there are demonstrable economic and social benefits of the proposals; and
- there are no significant detrimental impacts on the existing community, and
- any impacts on the natural environment are capable of being adequately mitigated.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP8 | 5, 7, 9, |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|

Provision of new tourist accommodation

Policy justification

- 6.8 If the tourist economy is to grow, then it is important that tourist accommodation should be allowed to grow in Houghton and Wyton as well. However, such accommodation should be in keeping with the 'quiet tourism' offer of the wider area. Large-scale tourist accommodation, mainly in the form of large hotels, is not considered appropriate because of the impact that such large numbers of additional residential visitors are likely to have on local residents. In particular this relates to the additional levels of traffic that will be created on the local road network.
- 6.9 Again, the policies in the Huntingdonshire emerging Local Plan pertaining to the impact of development in the countryside (Policy LP11) should apply where relevant.

Policy

Policy HWNP9 – Provision of new tourist accommodation

Proposals for new tourist accommodation will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the following criteria can be met:

- there is no adverse impact upon traffic accessibility through Houghton and Wyton village; and
- there is acceptable pedestrian and cycle access to the services in the village, ideally via footpaths and cycle routes; and
- there is no adverse impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area or the setting of any listed building in the parish.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP9 | 5, 6, 9, 10, 17 |
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Change of use of tourist accommodation

Policy justification

- 6.10 There is a concern, based on several recent planning applications and permissions in the parish, that holiday accommodation is being changed into permanent residential dwellings. This has two impacts – first, it reduces the stock of holiday accommodation, thereby reducing the attractiveness of the local area for overnight visitors; and second, it increases the resident population of the parish, with the associated increased burden on services, in a piecemeal fashion.
- 6.11 It is appreciated that if holiday accommodation is no longer a viable business, then it may be appropriate to consider it for alternative uses. However, it is appropriate that any applicant for such change of use should have to demonstrate that the business is no longer viable. This should be done by providing substantial evidence to prove that the business is not viable as tourist or visitor accommodation. It is felt that 18 months is a reasonable time frame as this represents two trading seasons
- 6.12 Again, the policies in the Huntingdonshire emerging Local Plan pertaining to the impact of development in the countryside (Policy LP11) should apply where relevant.

Policy

Policy HWNP10 - Change of use of existing tourist accommodation to permanent residences

Change of use of existing tourist accommodation to permanent residences will be permitted if it can be demonstrated that it is no longer possible for the tourist accommodation to be operated as a viable ongoing concern. This will require evidence that best efforts have been taken through all reasonable avenues to market the property as tourist letting over a 18 month period of time.

Such development must not be located in flood zones 2 or 3.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP10 | 5, 6, 8, 11,17 |
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7 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

- 7.1 The intention of the policies in this section of the Neighbourhood Plan are to ensure that there is maintenance and further development, when required of enough locations and places to meet the recreational, educational, social and cultural needs of the residents of the parish.

Provision of new community facilities

Policy justification

- 7.2 A limited range of community facilities has been identified as being needed by the community at this present time. However, it is recognised that, over the plan period, it is likely that new or larger facilities will be needed. Also, existing facilities will need replacing once their ongoing maintenance is no longer financially viable.
- 7.3 Therefore, this policy seeks to provide general support for the provision of such community facilities, as opposed to identifying a finite list or specific locations for the provision of such facilities. It is recognised that the funding of such facilities is constrained and that the limited amount of residential development in the parish means that developer contributions will also be limited. Therefore, it will be important that the local community uses its resources to lever in funds through grants and other means in order to fund the bulk of the cost of any new facility. It is therefore important, where appropriate, that the planning process does not provide costly and unnecessary delays in their subsequent provision.
- 7.4 The specifically identified items are the provision of public conveniences serving the village, a guided bus-stop and allotments. Preferred sites have yet to be identified.

Policy

Policy HWNP11 – Provision of new community facilities

The provision of new community facilities to address the identified needs of the residents of the parish will be supported. These needs could relate to new recreation, leisure, spiritual, social, education and medical facilities.

Where appropriate, the use of private facilities to address the needs of the community and general public will be supported. In particular this could include the provision of public conveniences to serve the village.

With the exception of sports changing room facilities, any such development should not be located in flood zones 2 or 3.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP11 | 5, 7, 8,17 |
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8 DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS FOR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Policy justification

8.1 The Parish Council will use CIL receipts to address the infrastructure impacts arising from growth. Priorities for infrastructure expenditure will be reviewed regularly and will be subject to change. These include:

- A traffic survey to address traffic issues in the parish and the village.
- Creation of plan to improve the traffic flows, parking and appearance of the village centre.
- Provision of a site for a new non-vehicular river crossing.
- Replacement of existing unsuitable infrastructure items with items suitable for a rural environment including bus shelters, street lights, rubbish bins, public signs (including information signs) and public seating.
- Pedestrian/bridleway route between Houghton Hill to Meadow Lane giving access to Home Farm Road – across the Back Brook.

The Parish Council will work closely with all infrastructure providers to develop and deliver the relevant infrastructure.

Priorities for infrastructure spending will be reviewed regularly by the Parish Council.

Policy

Policy HWNP12 – Developer contributions

Huntingdonshire District Council has a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in place. New development within the district will be expected to pay the relevant CIL charge and the funding pot will be used to address infrastructure needs. Of these proceeds raised within the parish, 25% will be given directly to Houghton and Wyton Parish to spend on addressing the impacts of growth. Whilst growth is not expected to be significant and therefore proceeds from CIL relatively low, it is important to prioritise this spending on particular issues.

Some of the infrastructure projects require cooperation with the neighbouring parishes and partners. It is the Parish Council's intention that through the Neighbourhood Plan it will continue to work with its neighbours and partners on the infrastructure projects.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP12 | 15 |
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9 TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

- 9.1 The Neighbourhood Plan process identified a number of transport-related issues. In particular, there are issues of traffic flow through the village and parking at the village green which it is considered would benefit from a comprehensive transport study. The funding of this has been identified under the developer contributions policy (Policy HWNP12).
- 9.2 However, there are other matters which relate to highway safety (pertaining to access from new development), parking at new developments and access by non-car modes. When there is any development of the connecting infrastructure within the parish, including roads, footpaths, cycleways, bridleways and towpaths, then all aspects relating to safety of the user(s) will be a prime consideration. In particular the dimensions, type of construction and surfacing, and nature of its intended use, will be assessed to ensure the safety of any user.

Highway safety – Access from new development

Policy justification

- 9.3 The nature of the rural roads, even very close to the village, is such that they can be quite dangerous by nature of their size and the number of blind bends. This is exacerbated by the significant levels of traffic that use the main routes surrounding the village, specifically the A1123, A141 and B1090.
- 9.4 It is therefore particularly important that new development which will access these busy routes is appropriate in terms of ensuring the safety of traffic. The creation of new additional access points is generally considered to increase risks to traffic safety. If new development has the opportunity to replace an existing formal access point with a new formal access point, then this is to be encouraged. A 'formal' access point is one that provides an officially adopted method of access onto a public highway as opposed to informal access provided by, for example, a farm track.
- 9.5 Furthermore, given the additional traffic using these roads, accidents and casualties are often observed to increase when buildings are located adjacent to the roads as opposed to being set back. In some cases, accidents have resulted in significant damage to buildings (and therefore also to the vehicles involved) because of their proximity to the highway. Proposals for any new development will ensure that new buildings are set away from the highway. This will allow natural screening to address visual, noise and air pollution.
- 9.6 In their planning consultation to the Houghton Grange planning application (ref: 11/01937/OUT) Cambridgeshire County Council made the following comments regarding likely traffic impact in 2017:

"7. The Transport Assessment considers the local highway network in 2017. It examines two scenarios, ie the network with and without the Houghton Grange site. The "without development" scenario includes traffic associated with the two committed development sites referred to above.

8. The Transport Assessment assesses; the new Slepe Meadow site access traffic signal junction, the Hill Rise / High Leys traffic signal junction and the Ramsey Road /St Audreys Lane traffic signal junction. The TA indicates that, without the Houghton Grange development, all of these junctions will operate beyond their capacity in 2017."

- 9.7 The existing trees, hedges and ditches act as a safety and – in the case of the trees and hedges – sound barrier between the road traffic and buildings. These should therefore be preserved rather than being removed and replaced with, for example, brick walls or wooden fences.

Policy

Policy HWNP13 – Access from new development

The A1123, A141 and B1090 are all through routes whose capacity and safety will be affected adversely by additional access points. Appropriate developments are encouraged by this Neighbourhood plan but any new developments requiring a new access point onto these roads that go through and past the Parish will have to demonstrate the positive need for it in traffic terms, through modelling and analytical work, if they are to be taken forward. Furthermore there will be a need to demonstrate why the usage of an existing access point, even with improvement works, would not be more appropriate.

For developments fronting on to the A1123, A141 and B1090 roads, new buildings must be positioned to maximise the potential of natural screening to minimise visual, noise and air pollution. This is also to protect the safety of road users along these routes.

Any trees, hedges or ditches along the edge of the roadsides are to be preserved, except where provision for a new access point has to be made.

This policy shall apply to residential developments of three or more dwellings and any other type of development creating more than 500m² of new floorspace.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP13 | 15, 16 |
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Parking

Policy justification

- 9.8 There are high levels of car ownership locally – 1.56 cars per household in the parish of Houghton and Wyton as compared to 1.47 cars per household in Huntingdonshire district and 1.33 cars per household across the East of England region¹¹. This partly reflects the rural location of the neighbourhood plan area but also the limited public transport that is available. The principle bus service (the 1A/1B) operates between one and two services an hour to and from Cambridge and Huntingdon but does not operate in the evenings. Given that there is not expected to be any increase in bus provision to serve Houghton and Wyton then the propensity to increase bus patronage is expected to be very limited. Therefore new development will bring significant numbers of additional cars that will have to find places to park.

¹¹ Source: 2011 Census

- 9.9 In addition, new tourist development will bring more cars into the parish. It is important that a balance is struck between the benefits that this brings in terms of income from tourism, and the loss of amenity for local residents and businesses.

Figure 8.1: Parking in the village centre



- 9.10 It is important that new development adequately provides for the parking needs arising from it. In particular, development close to the centre of the village – along with additional tourist visits - is likely to create significant levels of on-street parking unless appropriate off-road solutions are provided.

Policy

Policy HWNP14 – Parking to serve new development/Houghton and Wyton village

For all new residential developments the following parking standards shall apply for the provision of off-road parking:

- 1 bed house/flat 1 off-road car parking space
- 2 bed house/flat 2 off-road car parking spaces
- 3 bed house/flat 2 off-road car parking spaces
- 4 bed house/flat 3 off-road car parking spaces
- 5+bed house/flat 4 off-road car parking spaces

Any proposals to provide additional car parking to serve the village of Houghton and Wyton will be supported in principle.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP14 | 6, 10, 15 |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------|

Access by non-car modes

Policy justification

- 9.11 The community considers that the network of footpaths and cycle paths across the parish is a valuable asset. It wishes to expand this network, both for use by residents and by the tourists that are attracted to the area.
- 9.12 It is vital that, where possible, foot and cycle paths are provided that link to the centre of the village. This is where the majority of services are provided and the extra footfall, that these links will create, will serve to increase the viability of the shops and services in the centre of the village, whilst at the same time not worsening the problems with traffic and parking there. For example:
- From the equestrian centre on Sawtry Way to the cemetery
 - From Meadow Lane opposite the cemetery to the back brook
 - From Houghton Grange to the Thicket which leads to the village centre
 - From the Thicket (opposite the Elms) to the meadows and camp site
 - From Meadow Lane going east along the old railway line towards Houghton Grange
- 9.13 In addition, access to bus services is important to ensure that those without access to a car (in 2011, 9% of the households in the parish did not have access to a car¹²). Therefore, it should be easy to access bus stops on foot from new developments that are creating additional movements.
- 9.14 Where there is currently a lack of provision of a good footpath and/or cycle path to the village centre and/or a bus stop within a reasonable distance, new developments which are creating additional movements must seek to address this by providing new access paths. Only where it is physically not possible to make such provision will the policy not apply.

Policy

Policy HWNP15 – Access by non-car modes

Any development within the parish which creates additional movements will have to demonstrate that there is good access to the village centre on foot or by bicycle and/or that there is good access to an operational bus route. Where such access is lacking and there is a deliverable solution, new provision must be made towards addressing this.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP15 | 10, 15 |
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¹² Source: 2011 Census

10 FLOOD RISK AND DRAINAGE

Policy justification

- 10.1 The parish is situated in a river valley with a river that regularly floods and is protected by a flood bank. The longer the river remains flooded the more surface water run-off accumulates in the ditches and the brook, and the risk of flooding increases until the river cannot remove the excess water. The longer the flood plain is covered in water the more opportunity there is of water leakage through the flood protection bank. Water can then flood roads, gardens, houses and parts of the sewerage system.
- 10.2 In the locality a further threat comes from leakage from the existing sewer system and the ongoing silting up of the River Ouse.
- 10.3 In the winter of 2012/13, the village came very close to major flooding problems, with Thicket Road impassable to motor vehicles on several occasions. The Parish Council also received several reports from residents that their houses were on the verge of flooding and that power had been lost, even with sandbags having been deployed.
- 10.4 The 2011 Great Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan, produced by the Environment Agency, identified the parish as being in a flood risk area where the risks are currently deemed to be appropriately-managed, but where the risk of flooding is expected to rise significantly in the future. The number of properties at risk from flooding in the Houghton/Hemingford/St Ives area could rise fourfold over the next century as existing flood defences are over-topped. This is a key point - there are some areas benefitting from defences that could fail (breach) and then cause more hazards (from rapid or unexpected inundation) than the undefended scenario. A breach could also extend the area at risk of flooding by concentrating flood water on a limited area. This is the most serious risk in terms of consequence with hazards to people and property. Moreover, this assumes that there is no new development, yet within this area there are significant levels of new development already planned.
- 10.5 The NPPF states at paragraph 100 that, "Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk".
- 10.6 It is therefore considered prudent that, until new flood defences are put in place, a robust approach is adopted to new development, and developers must demonstrate that it will not cause problems with flooding and drainage.
- 10.7 It should also be recognised that flooding problems do not only come from surface water flooding but also from groundwater flooding. These issues in aggregate can serve to create the problems that have been experienced in recent years. Planning applications should therefore consider both issues jointly. If this serves to create an unacceptable cumulative impact, then an application should be refused.
- 10.8 Adequate surface water management is crucial to help Houghton and Wyton adapt to, and mitigate for, climate change. The National SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) Standards and Building Regulations Part H set out a clear hierarchy for surface water management and it is important that new developments manage surface water through SuDS rather than connecting into the public system.

Policy

Policy HWNP16 - Flooding and drainage

No extra 'less vulnerable', 'more vulnerable' or 'highly vulnerable' development (as defined in Planning Practice Guidance) shall be permitted in flood zones 2 and 3.

Development will only be permitted where it has been demonstrated that there is adequate flood and drainage infrastructure capacity in place to serve the development without risk to existing development, either from defence breach or over-topping from events exceeding the design standard of protection.

Any developments which would reduce the surface water storage capacity of a site will not be permitted unless an alternative storage facility is provided to compensate. Such a facility must be approved by the Environment Agency or other appropriate body.

Any development requiring flood prevention measures must have those measures completed prior to occupation of any part of the development.

Replacement dwellings and buildings are required to demonstrate safety and a significant reduction in flood risk, including taking account of climate change effects.

All developments will be expected to demonstrate that they have followed the surface water management hierarchy to ensure that infiltration is considered and provided for ahead of maintaining connection to sewers. Such developments must demonstrate that, where possible, they have reinstated natural drainage flow pathways.

Any development increasing the demand on the drainage systems is required to provide written confirmation from the appropriate sewerage provider that sufficient infrastructure capacity exists, or that any required increase in sewerage capacity is completed prior to occupation of any part of the development.

Mitigation must be undertaken for all planning applications for any cumulative impact of surface water and groundwater flooding that would be created by development.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP16 | 16 |
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11 BUSINESS

Providing for the needs of new and existing businesses

Policy justification

11.1 One of the key themes in the NPPF is supporting a prosperous rural economy. Paragraph 28 states:

"Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;*
- promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres;*
- 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."*

11.2 There are over 33 businesses within the parish which does not include those working as sole traders. Over the plan period, it is considered vital to support local services and businesses in order that they may create employment opportunities for residents and local people.

11.3 In particular in a rural location, it is considered most appropriate to encourage small scale businesses which encourage and promote tourism and rural enterprise generally and/or benefit the local community. Many of these businesses will be start-ups and for these people, having access to low-cost premises on flexible rents is of paramount importance. The provision of such flexible space within the parish will therefore be welcomed.

11.4 Another feature of the local economy is the enduring, but adapting, agricultural base. Whilst relatively small, it does provide local employment and makes effective use of the land. It is also adapting to new trends with the opening up of farm shops, for example. Such enterprises should be encouraged rather than stifled.

11.5 Support will therefore be given to proposals which demonstrate an active approach to providing sustainable commercial activity within the context of a rural parish.

11.6 The one caveat is the concern over sprawling development along the main routes that surround the built up area of the parish – namely the A1123, A141 and B1090 routes. Along these routes there are more restrictions on new businesses, as these are not considered to represent the

most appropriate locations for such development. Again, the policies in the Huntingdonshire emerging Local Plan pertaining to the impact of development in the countryside (Policy LP11) should apply where relevant.

Policy

Policy HWNP17 – Provision for the needs of new or expanded businesses

Proposals for developing new businesses or expanding existing businesses will be supported provided they are appropriate to their rural setting, reflect as appropriate the character of the village and/or the countryside within the parish and are not located in flood zones 2 or 3.

Proposals that provide premises suitable for use by start-up or incubator businesses will be strongly supported.

Proposals that result in the loss of existing retail or leisure facilities that are in use will generally be refused, unless it can be demonstrated that appropriate provision can be made in suitable alternative locations within the parish that does not increase the need to travel by the existing population.

Proposals must demonstrate that they will result in no more than a minimal increase in light, noise and air pollution.

Proposals will be considered favourably if they can address one or more of the following criteria:

They can develop the agricultural base in the parish.

- They can offer new employment opportunities.
- They increase retail space within the village centre.

In order to protect the rural setting and avoid unacceptable ribbon development leading out from the village, new commercial development located close to the existing built up area along either the A1123, A141 or B1090 routes must demonstrate the following:

- That where possible, any existing trees, hedges or ditches along the edge of the highway are retained.
- That it will not have a detrimental impact upon views of the landscape.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP17 | 7, 8,17 |
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Retailing in the Countryside

Policy justification

- 11.7 The creation and expansion of rural businesses can contribute towards a prosperous rural economy. However, whilst promoting a strong rural economy, the NPPF also recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, which is a valuable asset. Retail development in the countryside, if not strictly controlled, can also run counter to the objectives of sustainable development, by creating additional journeys to rural locations. It is therefore necessary to restrict development to that which primarily supports the active maintenance of land in agricultural and other appropriate land-based uses, such as farm shops primarily retailing produce at, and produced upon, their own holding.
- 11.8 In considering such development, the Neighbourhood Plan will support proposals where a significant proportion of produce, in terms of turnover, would originate upon the farm holding where it would be sold. It would wish to restrict produce which does not originate upon the holding, for sustainability reasons. The Neighbourhood Plan will seek to resist retail proposals in rural locations where the business case is not considered to justify such a location.

Policy

Policy HWNP18 - Retail units in the countryside

Development to accommodate the retailing of fresh produce at the point of production (or originating from the farm holding) that is located outside the built-up area boundary will be considered favourably (subject to the other policies in the development plan) if it meets all of the following criteria:

- A significant proportion, based on annual turnover, of the range of goods offered for sale continues to be fresh produce grown and sold on the farm holding in question; and
- The range of any additional sale goods would be restricted to agricultural produce and the offer for sale of other goods, including packaged or preserved food products, and
- The proposal would not have a detrimental impact on the viability of the existing shops in Houghton and Wyton village.
- The development is not located in flood zones 2 or 3.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP18 | 2, 6, 8, 9,17 |
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12 HOUSING

Small-scale residential development

Policy justification

- 12.1 In 2011 there were 826 dwellings in the parish of Houghton and Wyton. The large majority are located in the village whilst the remainder are spread around the parish – mainly at Hartford Marina in the west and the Pine Hill Park development along Sawtry Way.
- 12.2 Like many old villages, development initially occurred slowly over many centuries and resulted in a stock of very individualistic housing. More recent developments over the last 40 years have tended to be medium scale and of a more similar type. However, the parish remains rural in nature and housing at the edges blends well into the countryside which completely surrounds it and provides the important separation, distinct from neighbouring settlements.
- 12.3 Protecting the separate identity of Houghton and Wyton is a key objective of the Neighbourhood Plan, and retention of this surrounding countryside is crucial to retaining the distinctiveness of the village. Policy HWNP1 seeks to focus development within the built up area boundary, as defined in Figure 4.1 - development in open countryside should not be permitted if it would have the effect of reducing the separate identity of Houghton and Wyton. In addition, the policies in the Huntingdonshire emerging Local Plan pertaining to the impact of development in the countryside will apply to restrict any such development.
- 12.4 Looking over the plan period to 2036, the Neighbourhood Plan Survey 2013 demonstrated broad satisfaction with the mix of houses currently available, reflecting the broad range of accommodation that residents enjoy across the parish. This ranges from some permanent residency house boats and park homes, which offer low entry price into the area, through apartments to large detached properties.
- 12.5 The demographics of the village reflect those of Huntingdonshire generally with the largest proportion of the population being of retirement age. There is no significant growth envisaged in the local population, other than via tourism and through development of the Houghton Grange site in the east, and very low levels of net migration are expected (based on this limited growth and the popularity of the parish with those already living there). However, the Neighbourhood Plan Survey did highlight that over time there will be a gradual shift towards needing a greater proportion of accommodation for single and dual occupancy (77% respondents agreed) as well as dwellings specifically designed for the needs of older people (80% agreed). Residents want to be able to downsize as they get older but not be forced to move out of the village. Having a stock of smaller properties for downsizing also means that these older people will be more willing to move and release their larger properties back to the housing stock in order that they become family homes again.
- 12.6 Within this, there is also a need to provide affordable housing to address local needs. The neighbourhood plan area has a very low proportion of social rented properties – only 3% – yet for many people currently living in Houghton and Wyton, the price of properties on the open market is prohibitively high. In particular, some young families that have grown up in the village as well as older residents looking to downsize wish to stay living locally but cannot afford to do so. It is important that the provision of new dwellings reflects the needs of these people as well.

- 12.7 This is supported by the Cambridge Sub-Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)¹³ which identified that one-person and couple households will make up the majority of the household increase from 2011 to 2031. In fact, they will represent 96% of the household change over that period.
- 12.8 Development through small-scale, incremental growth enables better preservation of the general housing mix and harmony with the existing character of the local setting and buildings. It is essential that the supply of any new homes is realised in accordance with the distinctive features, scale and grain of the local area. Housing sites must be carefully considered and will only be acceptable where they reflect these principles and are consistent with the Neighbourhood Plan taken as a whole.
- 12.9 The Huntingdonshire Core Strategy provides the spatial strategy for housing development across the District at present. However, the emerging Local Plan will supersede it by 2015/16, and this identifies land at St Ives West for a mixed use allocation (Proposed Allocation SI1), including the land at Houghton Grange. This is the only site allocated or proposed for allocation within the parish.
- 12.10 Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development, it is expected that there will be windfall sites that come forward over the plan period. It is important that they are of a suitable scale to be in keeping with the parish and the village (90% of respondents from the NP survey agreed with small scale developments) Given the restriction on development outside the built-up area boundary, most of these small-scale windfalls are expected to come forward within the village.
- 12.11 Development that comes forward should therefore be small scale. It is considered that small scale would represent sites of no more than four to five dwellings or 0.15 hectares in size. The provision of a size threshold allows more dwellings to be provided on developments of flats or apartments.
- 12.12 Development proposals that address the needs of the local population will be supported. In particular, this is housing that is suitable for the needs of older people but would also provide opportunities for first-time buyers. Specifically this will be:
- two-bed and also one-bed properties that are built to Lifetime Homes standards; and
 - sheltered accommodation for older people.
- 12.13 In order to provide flexibility, it is considered that self-build development should also be encouraged.
- 12.14 The issue of flood risk, identified in Section 10 and Policy HWNP16, should also be taken into consideration. Residential development, being classified as 'more vulnerable development' in Planning Practice Guidance, should generally not be in flood zone 3. It also needs to be borne in mind that, for new dwellings in flood zones 2 and 3, extra residual risks to people still exist after mitigation through access and egress hazards during a flood when emergency services are already too busy to accept additional burden. For this reason, there is a strong presumption against additional residential development (small or large scale) in flood zones 2 and 3.

¹³ Cambridgeshire Insight (2013) *Cambridge Sub-Region Strategic Housing Market Assessment*, for Cambridgeshire authorities

Policy

Policy HWNP19 – Windfall residential development

Small scale windfall development for residential use within the built-up area boundary will be encouraged where it fulfils the following criteria:

- It provides no more than 4-5 dwellings or is on a plot no larger than 0.15ha; and
- It is not within flood zones 2 or 3; and
- It provides predominantly two- and one-bed properties (with two-bed properties preferred) built to Lifetime Homes standards; or
- It provides sheltered accommodation for older people.
- It does not impact upon the character or appearance of the conservation area or the setting of any listed building in the parish.

Self-build residential development shall also be supported.

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| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP19 | 10, 14, 16,17 |
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13 DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

Policy justification

13.1 Paragraph 58 of the NPPF states that:

"...neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*
- optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion;*
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping."*

13.2 The Huntingdonshire emerging Local Plan also recognises the importance of design quality based on a thorough understanding of a site and its context (Policy LP13 – 'Quality of Design'). In particular, the Neighbourhood Plan considers the most important aspects of this policy to be:

- solutions which reflect their surroundings;
- proposals must contribute positively to the local character, appearance, form and pattern of development through sensitive siting, scale, massing, form and arrangement of new development and use of colour and materials;
- proposals should respect and respond appropriately to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape, and avoid the introduction of incongruous and intrusive elements into views.

13.3 The emerging policy also requires that developments of 10 or more dwellings are expected to meet the 'Building for Life' Silver (Good) Standard or higher. This is strongly supported by the Neighbourhood Plan.

13.4 The community has identified this as an important issue in order to preserve the character of the village in particular and the parish in general.

Character Areas

- 13.5 A key consideration within the Neighbourhood Plan is to understand how certain areas define the character and feel of that community, and then identify where they are in order to make sure their importance is properly considered when making decisions on future developments.
- 13.6 The parish is characterised by its varied architectural styles, building density and layout, its road and footpath networks and its geographical setting. Together these elements confirm the village's identity as a small rural settlement.
- 13.7 The Neighbourhood Plan Survey recorded the importance that the community places on maintaining and protecting this small and rural character, both now and in the future.
- 13.8 Such areas of 'distinctive character' have been identified. It is important to note that the transitional areas between the distinctive areas are also important to the village scene where the same criteria should be applied, with reference to the relevant adjacent Character Area.
- 13.9 Key defining elements are identified under two headings - those which are common throughout the village and those which are specific to a particular road or street or part of the village.
- 13.10 The common distinctive character elements are:
- The lanes, footpaths and roads at the limit of the village, which have natural and largely untrimmed hedgerows.
 - The height and variety of the historic roof lines and separation between buildings and their interconnecting views.
 - Grass verges are regularly used to define the extent of the road, particularly in the older parts of the village.
 - The many and varied old and mature trees within the built environment. There are examples of such trees in both the older and more recently built areas of the village.
 - The pavements on one side of the road only.
 - The low density and period reproduction street lighting only extending as far as the last of the built envelope.
 - The limited use of white or yellow lines.
 - The low density use of road and street signs.
 - The use of cinder or gravel surfacing to footpaths.
 - The extent of natural and uninterrupted river frontage within the village boundary.
 - The generally low density of telegraph wires, satellite dishes, aerials or solar panels on the roof lines of buildings.
- 13.11 The Character Areas are shown in Appendix A. Where Policy HWNP21 refers to these Character Areas, it is expected that development should have due regard to the guidance provided in Appendix A for the respective Character Area. This applies to the Character Area that the development is in and also to any Character Area where development that is adjacent to it will have an impact upon it.

Policy

Policy HWNP20 - Design of new development

New development will be supported where it can demonstrate that it:-

- Respects and protects the village assets, conservation area, the setting of listed buildings and their curtilages.
- Delivers high quality, energy efficient development of architectural merit, distinctive and, where appropriate, individual in character.
- Responds to the heritage and the distinctive features of the particular Character Area of the parish in which it is situated. In particular it will reflect the character of the area through height, scale, spacing, layout, orientation, design and materials of buildings.
- Reflects, where relevant, the Conservation Area appraisal and the setting of the Great Ouse Valley.
- Respects the natural contours of a site and, where possible, protects and sensitively incorporates existing natural features such as trees, hedges and ponds that are within the site.
- Ensures that safe, accessible and well-connected routes to the centre of the village are provided.
- Maximises the energy efficiency of buildings. Development proposals that seek to conform to highest levels of energy efficiency will be considered favourably.
- Preserves the open and green character of the village and recognising the transition to the countryside, development located towards the edge of the built-up area boundary should be restricted to a maximum of two storeys in height and should ideally be single storey above surrounding land levels.
- An approved landscaping scheme is started and a completion date agreed prior to any occupation.

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Objectives addressed by Policy HWNP20 | 10, 12, 16 |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|

14 EXISTING DEVELOPMENT SITES - PARISH NEEDS & INTENTIONS

Houghton Grange and Beer's Garage Site

- 14.1 Houghton Grange is a significant asset within the parish. Located on the eastern edge of Houghton and Wyton village, the community wishes for it to be better incorporated into the village. This will enable it to serve the housing needs arising in the community.



- 14.2 The emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan proposes land at St Ives West for a mixed use allocation (Proposed Allocation SI1), including the land at Houghton Grange which is within the parish and closest to the village. However, the plans for Houghton Grange itself should respect its location within the parish.
- 14.3 Houghton Grange is a brownfield site incorporating an important listed building. Outline planning permission has been granted for up to 90 dwellings and it is considered that this provides the appropriate scale of growth to satisfy the housing needs of the parish and wider area over the plan period.
- 14.4 However, it is vital that this addresses the needs of the local community. The chapter on housing has identified that the predominant need is for smaller properties to address the needs of first time buyers and older people, as well as to provide for declining household sizes.
- 14.5 Therefore it is important that development at Houghton Grange provides a substantial proportion of smaller units. This would principally one and two bed properties, with two bed properties preferred as these provide more flexibility for occupiers as their needs change.
- 14.6 In particular, it is important that the needs of older people and those with disabilities are properly met. 73% of respondents to the survey supported part of Houghton Grange to be a retirement community. The requirement to develop properties to Lifetime Homes standards will help to achieve this.
- 14.7 Development should also seek to provide an element of live/work units. They would provide potential for small businesses to continue to thrive in the parish. In order that this does not just provide for office-based uses, the development of such units, which are in the Sui Generis Use

Class, may incorporate an element of Use Classes A2 or B1. This is considered beneficial in providing sustainable growth within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

- 14.8 In order to ensure that any proposals address the requirements of the local community, it is vital that they are properly planned. A step-by-step approach to the production of a coherent plan will help to achieve this. In the early stages, it is important that the community is involved in shaping this plan and the principles that underpin it. This can only be achieved if there are events scheduled into its production which involve the community.
- 14.9 The intention of this section is to ensure that where live/work units are permitted, they do not give rise to unacceptable impacts on nearby residents.
- 14.10 Beer's Garage Site is a brownfield development site in the heart of the village and conservation area. Whatever is constructed here will help define the character of the village for generations to come. It currently has outline planning permission for 4 terraced cottages with parking and gardens at the rear reflecting the adjacent Victorian terraced houses.

Parish Intention

Houghton Grange

- 14.11 In order to provide for the needs of the local community, proposals for residential development at Houghton Grange shall provide the following:
- i. A balanced mix of high quality accommodation, with at least 40% of the properties being two- and one-bed properties (with two-bed properties preferred).
 - ii. A number of self-build plots.
 - iii. Live/work units, with the opportunity to provide for an incidental amount of financial and professional service (Class A2) or office/research/light industrial (Class B1) use. Such uses must not give rise to unacceptable impacts on the amenity of neighbouring residences.
 - iv. Development to Lifetime Homes standards.
- 14.12 In order to ensure that any proposals meet the needs of the community, it is vital that the community is involved in establishing the principles of any plan. Community events and activities to inform this should be undertaken in conjunction with Huntingdonshire District Council and Houghton and Wyton Parish Council and should ensure extensive engagement with the local community in shaping the outputs.
- 14.13 To ensure the development of Beer's site sits well in the character area this development needs to be one cohesive development of architectural merit and identity.

Beer's Garage Site

- 14.14 The community identified the need for a mixed development comprising:
- One- or two-bedroom properties to meet the need for the over-60s as 28% of village properties have single occupancy. Only 14 dwellings in the Parish have been built specifically for this age group and these were built in the 1970s.
 - Community amenity to serve the parish and the 150,000+ visitors. This site provides an ideal location to base a 'resource centre' which could comprise information about the village, village history and the Parish Office.
 - Further small and independent retail outlets sought by the residents.

15 MONITORING AND COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

- 15.1 To ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan, in its entirety, strives to deliver an improving quality of life for people in the parish, it is important that its progress is measured against an appropriate index.
- 15.2 The central theme of the Neighbourhood Plan is about improving quality of life. Therefore, it is appropriate that the index of monitoring targets is closely related to quality of life indices. This will be developed by Houghton and Wyton Parish Council in conjunction with the local community.
- 15.3 The monitoring of this index will be undertaken through a questionnaire survey, distributed to every person on the electoral roll. This will be undertaken at least every five years and the results shared and used to influence Parish Council decisions.
- 15.4 Statement of intent.
- 15.5 The process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan has identified a number of important actions which have not been included in the main body of the Plan. This is because these are not specifically related to land use matters and therefore sit outside the jurisdiction of a Neighbourhood Plan. However, this is not to say that these actions are not important and they are contained in the appendix under Community Action Plan and will be reviewed regularly by the Parish Council.

Community Right to Bid

- 15.6 The Community Right to Bid (Assets of Community Value in legislation) is one of a number of new rights introduced in the Localism Act 2011.
- 15.7 The Community Right to Bid allows communities and parish councils to nominate buildings or land for listing by Huntingdonshire District Council as an asset of community value. An asset can be listed if its principal use furthers (or has recently furthered) their community's social well-being or social interests (which include cultural, sporting or recreational interests) and is likely to do so in the future.
- 15.8 When an owner of an asset that is on the list of assets of community value wishes to sell building or land, a moratorium on the sale (of up to six months) may be invoked, providing local community groups with a chance to raise finance, develop a business plan and make a bid to buy the asset on the open market.
- 15.9 Houghton and Wyton has currently listed the following:
- The Three Horseshoes Inn, The Green, Houghton
 - The Green, Hill Estate, Houghton
 - The Green, Loxley Green, Wyton

GLOSSARY

- **Affordable housing** - Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market
- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – A fixed, non-negotiable contribution that must be made by new development. It is chargeable on each net additional square metre of development built and is set by the Huntingdonshire District Council.
- **Core Strategy** – The planning policy document adopted by Huntingdonshire District Council in 2009, covering Houghton and Wyton parish. This addresses strategic planning matters and the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework, must be in general conformity with the adopted Core Strategy.
- **Emerging Huntingdonshire Local Plan** – The document which, when adopted, will supersede the current Core Strategy. This Local Plan is addressing planning matters up to 2036 and includes strategic allocations which impact on Houghton and Wyton.
- **Intermediate tenure housing** - Homes for sale and rent provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels subject to the criteria in the Affordable Housing definition above. These can include shared equity (shared ownership and equity loans), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent, but not affordable rented housing.
- **Lifetime Homes** - Dwellings that incorporate 16 design criteria which can be universally applied to new homes at minimal cost. Each design feature adds to the comfort and convenience of the home and supports the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages of life. In particular, it ensures that many disabled or older people are able to live within their own home as opposed to a care setting.
- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** – The national planning policy document which sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- **Social rented housing** - Housing owned by local authorities and private registered providers for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime.
- **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)** – An evidence base exercise undertaken by all local authorities to determine the amount of land that has theoretical potential for housing development. All sites put forward are considered for their availability, suitability and deliverability for housing. If a site addresses all of these requirements then it is considered to have theoretical potential for housing development; however, this does not mean that the site will be brought forward for development or that a planning application will be granted planning permission. All sites for consideration are collated through a ‘Call for Sites’ exercise which invites anyone to put forward land for consideration through the SHLAA process.

Appendix A Character Areas

Figure : Character Areas

The Wyton end access road from the A1123



Manor Close



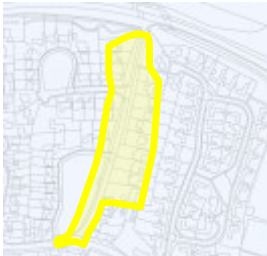
Rectory Lane



Church Walk



Ware Lane



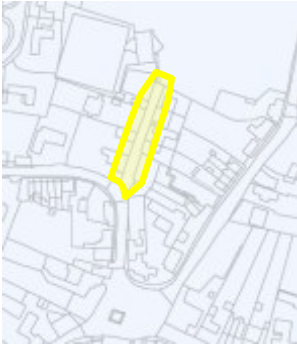
Victoria Crescent



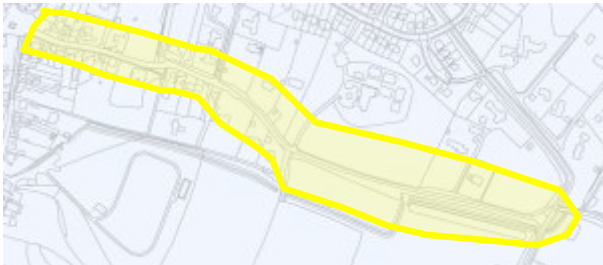
Green Lane



Laughtons Lane



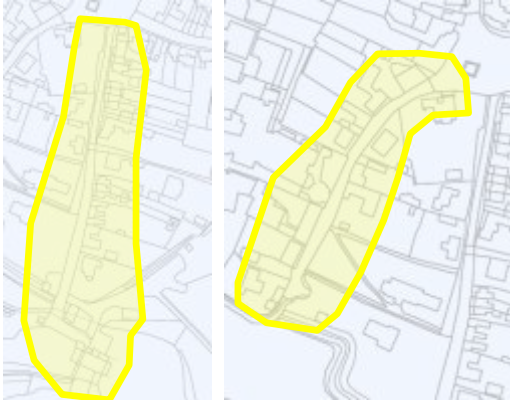
Thicket Road



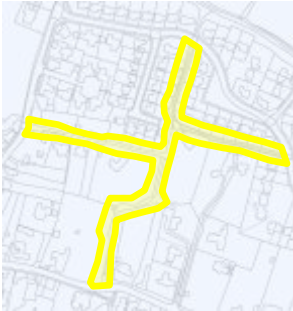
The village centre



Mill Street and Chapel Lane



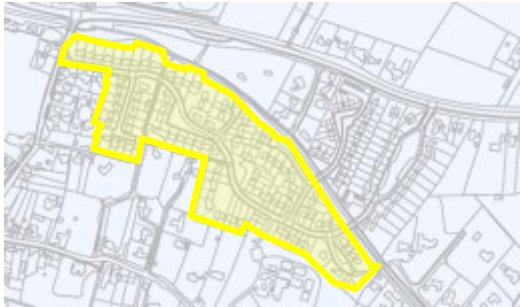
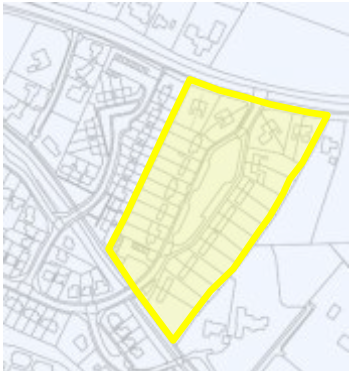
The Lanes



Love Lane



Hill Estate



Home Farm Road

The Wyton end access road from the A1123

- As the Huntingdon Road leaves the A1123 there are a limited number of low rise houses on the left which gives an open character to the village approach.
- There is scope to open up, and protect, the historic sheep splash on the left hand side, as a further character enhancing feature.
- There is also scope to define the rural feel of the village by softening the hard tarmac traffic prioritising entrance and exit to the village using more rural junction design incorporating rustic fencing, signage and grass verges and clear options for cyclists and pedestrians.



Manor Close

- The wide entrance road, with green verges on either side leads to a small estate of semi-detached houses built in the early 1920s.
- Each of the symmetrical pairs of houses have retained their rendered and painted exterior
- All have relatively large front and rear gardens separated by low level hedging, and each has off-street parking provided by a wide driveway between each pair of houses.
- The estate provides an important size of housing in the overall mix of accommodation available in the village.
- This small estate represents an intact representation of a former council house design with generous plots sizes compared to houses being built today, with each house retaining its original appearance, finish and character.



Rectory Lane

- A rural no-through-road with grass verges and lined with mature trees with access to the Grade I-listed Church of All Saints, Wyton.
- Church Walk, an ancient connecting footpath between Rectory Lane and Huntingdon Road.
- There is a mix of older and modern low-density housing with associated low levels of traffic which is in balance with the rural nature of the road.



Church Walk

- Church Walk is a regularly used historic footpath leading from Huntingdon Road, initially between old houses, down to the RAF cemetery and Wyton church.
- There is limited vehicle access along a gravelled first section for residents of the houses on either side. The surface then becomes a natural rural footpath between old walls and established vegetation on either side as it reaches the church.



Ware Lane

- The ancient trackway is one of the original thoroughfares in the village of Wyton and part of the old main road between Huntingdon and St Ives. It has wide grass verges backed by ditches and hedges on both sides without any road markings and, due to the development of the A1123 past the village, is now a no-through-road to vehicles, but still allows cyclists and pedestrians to leave the village towards the north.
- Ware Lane starts at Huntingdon Road. On the left is situated Loxley Green and the modern development of three-storey townhouses, with the 18th century manor farmhouse in the north-west corner. On the right are the modern Old Manor Farm flats.
- Housing development in the lane took place in the early 1970s and on the right hand side there are bungalows, and then dormer bungalows. On the left hand side there are two pairs of detached houses, all characterised by long front gardens and drives which bridge the ditches.



Victoria Crescent

- The houses on Victoria Crescent represent a unique architectural style in the village.
- Designed by Sir Colin St-John Wilson (architect of the British Library) who wanted to offer his own 'inside out' design style in a village environment, laid out in a closed crescent, built in the 1960s.
- Their collective character is of common single storey timber cladding over white exterior walls.
- The single road entry into and out of the crescent creates a private feel as well as preventing through traffic access.
- The building density coupled with the single storey construction has created an open feel to the estate, added to by the open and unfenced front gardens and wide road with verges.



Green Lane

- A no through lane, without pavements narrowing to a rural footpath beyond the school, offering important access to the school and the playing field.
- Unspoilt and open views from the lane across the playing field to the tree lined river bank beyond.



Laughtons Lane

- This is a private unmade road with limited vehicle access for residents.
- Laughtons Lane also provides a well-used pedestrian connection between the centre of the village and the playing field.



The village centre

- The centre represents an historic and important hub to the web of five roads into and out of the village.
- There is an important balance of village history and functionality represented by the clock tower, the Three Horseshoes pub, the old George and Dragon pub, the shop, the Potto Brown statue and plinth, the listed telephone kiosk and water pump, and the period garden wall at Whympers, which frames one side of the square.
- The seating outside the Three Horseshoes adds to the village centre street scene and acts as an acceptable traffic-calming measure
- There are important vistas from the centre. The church and its spire, the old and mature trees and the listed buildings around the centre.
- The absence of road markings, designated parking areas or the use of urban style signs.
- The limited use of shop signs, advertising signs or posters.



Mill Street and Chapel Lane

- Both are relatively narrow but have an open character helped by no on-street parking.
- Both have limited access with no through-traffic use.
- Both have important historic buildings relevant to the village's history. The architectural styles are rich and variable including thatched roofs and buildings with historical relevance, such as School House.
- The roof lines are varied with spaces between sufficient to provide interconnecting views to other parts of the village, including to Houghton Mill and the church.
- Mill Street in particular has a single pavement which changes to characterful cobbles in front of the row of thatched cottages.
- Signage and the entrance to Houghton Mill are unobtrusive and don't dominate the immediate surroundings.



Thicket Road

- One of the longest and oldest access routes to and from the village, The Thicket has a wide and varied mix of old and listed properties.
- There is a single footpath on the right hand side at the more populated end, which becomes a grass verge away from the village centre.
- Grass verges without kerb stones define the extent of the road.
- The pavement runs out at the village limit, and becomes the Thicket Path after the White Bridge.
- Along its length there is low density reproduction period lighting provided to the end of the run of houses.
- There is no through-route for traffic via Meadow Lane (except for emergency vehicles) with priority given to pedestrians, horse-riders and cyclists using the Thicket for access to St Ives.
- There is limited street signage, or lines controlling parking, maintaining the rural character of the road.
- There are many old and mature trees along the length of The Thicket, and in the gardens of the larger houses. A low natural hedge and open metal railings afford views of the formal Elms gardens.
- Beyond the Elms, there are a small number of houses on the left hand side which all stand well back from the road. This, coupled with the lack of the houses on the right, and the open views across the fields to the river, all add to the rural character of this part of the village.



The Lanes and Love Lane

- These interconnecting lanes represent historic cart tracks and footpaths offering routes between the village, the river and Houghton Mill.
- Today The Lanes and Love Lane represent a well-used and popular network of unspoilt, natural rural footpaths with minimal street lighting, crisscrossing the village, as they have since the village was established.



Home Farm Road (excluding the three-dwelling development on the corner of St Ives Road built later)

- Home Farm Road represents a style of estate development of its time when it was built between 1968 and 1970.
- Houses are set well back from the road with large front gardens and relatively wide pavements.
- The frontages are laid to a variety of lawns or planted gardens but the overall feel is of open space, without the interruption of high dividing hedges or fences.
- The access roads comprise long sweeping curves which add to the feeling of space and widen the general panoramic views across the estate.
- Mature trees have been retained, which together with the green open spaces, adds a softening and pleasing character to the harder lines of the houses.
- The houses have been built with off-road garages and parking which beneficially minimises any on road parking.



Hill Estate

- Built between 1947 and 1952, Hill Estate is a strong example of post war council-built housing and layout.
- The red brick semi-detached houses are built on spacious plots with large front gardens.
- The houses face inwards towards the open well-kept green area with mature trees bringing an identity to the estate as a whole.
- The one way circulatory road is respected and contributes to free flow of traffic to and from the estate.
- There is a locally agreed stipulation that prevents on-the-verge parking. The estate has retained a period block of garages for use by estate residents.

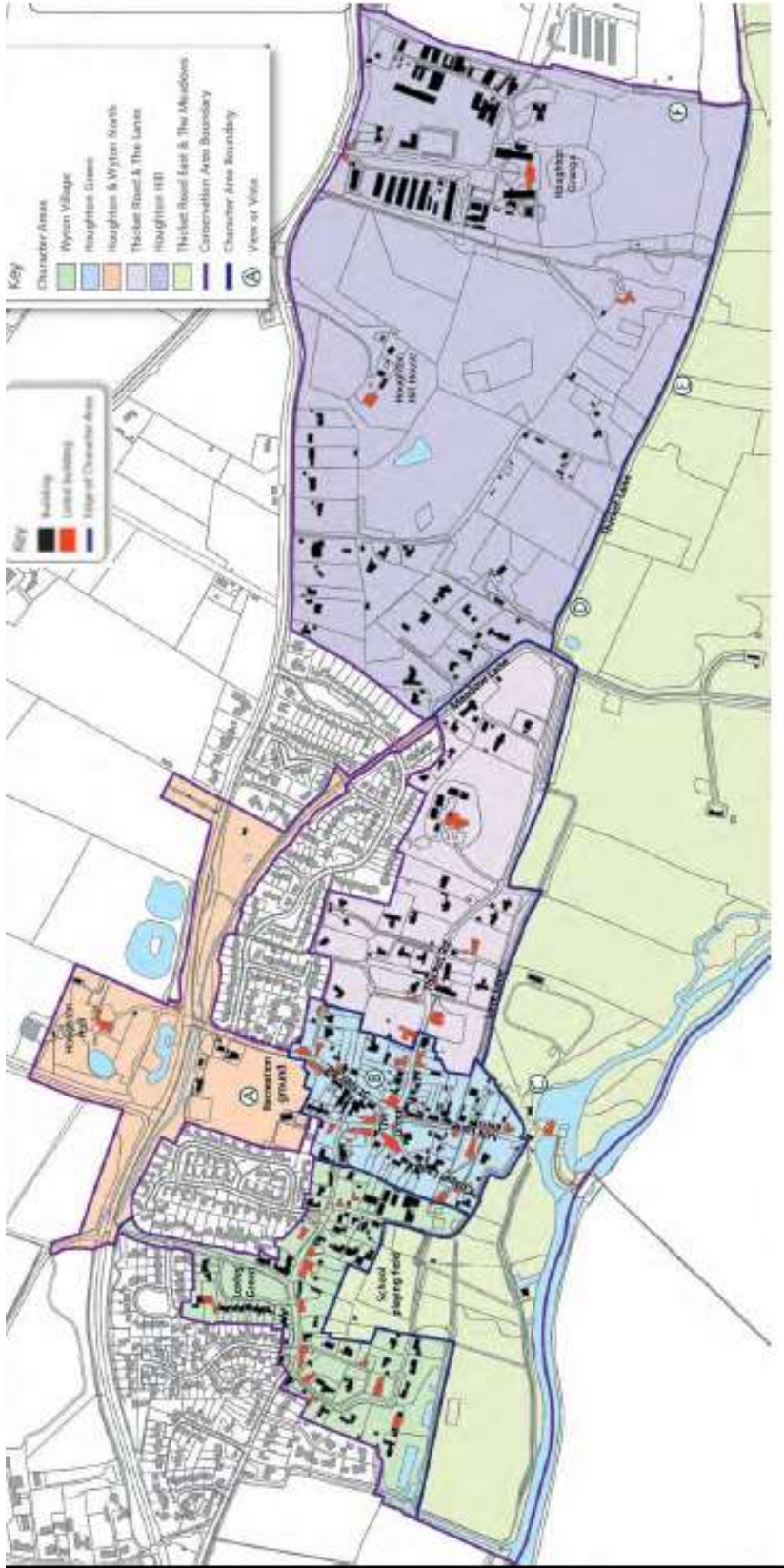


Appendix B – Community Action plan

The following list of actions have arisen out of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process:

| Action | Lead body | Timescale |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Time Bank | Houghton and Wyton Parish Council | Short-medium |
| Bus stops | Houghton and Wyton Parish Council | Medium |
| Review access across the A1123 | Houghton and Wyton Parish Council | Medium |
| Review pedestrian access from Houghton Hill across the Back Brook towards Home Farm Road | Parish Council and residents | Medium |
| Monitor ongoing usage and requirement of community buildings | Houghton and Wyton Parish Council | Medium |

Appendix C Listed buildings



- **1, The Green**
Grade II*
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **1,2 and 3, Chapel Lane**
Grade II
1 Chapel Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **3, The Lanes**
Grade II
The Lanes, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Allanby Cottage**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Beth Haccерem Dolly Peg Cottages Thatched Cottages**
Grade II
Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Beth-haccерem 5**
Grade DL
9 Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Black Horse Cottage**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Buckley House Thrae**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Church of All Saints**
Grade I
5 Rectory Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Dovecote Magdalene House**
Grade II
9 Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Durley Cottage**
Grade II
Rectory Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **East Lodge to Houghton Poultry Research Station West Lodge to Houghton Poultry Research Station**
Grade II
Houghton Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Elder Cottage**
Grade II
St Ives Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Fernleigh Small House**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Glebe Cottage**
Grade II
9 Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire

- **Holme Cottage**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Houghton Bury**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Houghton Hill House**
Grade II
Houghton Hill Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Houghton Mill**
Grade II*
Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Houghton Poultry Research Station**
Grade II
Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **K6 Telephone Kiosk by Clock Tower**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Ladymere**
Grade II
Houghton Hill Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Little Dormers**
Grade II
Houghton and Wyton
- **Manor Farmhouse**
Grade II*
St Ives Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Manor Farmhouse**
Grade II
Loxley Green, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **May Cottage**
Grade II
4 St Ives Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Memorial Shelter and Clock Tower**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Mill House**
Grade II
Houghton Hill Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Millers Meade**
Grade II
Houghton and Wyton
- **Monument to Potto Brown**
Grade II
Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire

- **Parish Church of St Mary**
Grade II
9 Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Provender House Scrivener's Foodstore**
Grade II
1 Chapel Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Riverside**
Grade II
9 Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Rose Cottage**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Schae**
Grade II
5 Rectory Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Silver Birches**
Grade II
St Ives Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Soma House Wayside**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Stuart Cottage**
Grade II
9 Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Stuart House**
Grade II
1 St Margarets Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Sweet Briar**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Thatched Barn at Rectory Farm**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Thatched White Cottage**
Grade II
Green Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Barn**
Grade II
Rectory Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Cedars**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Elms**
Grade II
Houghton Hill Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire

- **The Homestead**
Grade II
Green Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Lindens**
Grade II
Chapel Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Manor**
Grade II
Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Old Rectory**
Grade II
Mere Way, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **The Old Rectory**
Grade II
6 Rectory Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Three Horseshoes Public House**
Grade II
2 Thicket Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Three Jolly Butchers Public House**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Tun Cottage**
Grade II
The Lanes, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **United Reform Chapel**
Grade II
Chapel Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Village Pump**
Grade II
1 Mill Street, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **Walden House**
Grade II
Laughton's Lane, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **West End Cottage**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire
- **White Cottage**
Grade II
Huntingdon Road, Houghton, Cambridgeshire

EXAM/15

Houghton and Wyton Parish Council

**Houghton & Wyton
Neighbourhood Development
Plan 2015 - 2036**

Independent Examiner's Report

By Ann Skippers BSc (Hons) Dip Mgmt (Open) PGC(TLHE)(Open) MRTPI FHEA FRSA AoU

14 December 2015

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Summary

I have been appointed as the independent examiner of the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan.

The Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan is the second neighbourhood plan to reach examination stage in Huntingdonshire. It has clearly been driven by a strong desire to protect the special character of the villages.

I have found it necessary to suggest a number of modifications to the Plan to ensure it meets the basic conditions and subject to those modifications I am satisfied that the Plan:

- Has regard to national policies and advice
- Contributes to the achievement of sustainable development
- Is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area
- Does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations and the European Convention of Human Rights and
- Meets all other requirements that I am obliged to examine.

I am therefore pleased to recommend that the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan can go forward to a referendum subject to the modifications I have suggested. However, it will be noted that there is a tension between two of the basic conditions and so I have also suggested that Huntingdonshire District Council reconsiders the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment if the Plan is modified in accordance with these recommendations.

In considering whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Neighbourhood Plan area I see no reason to alter or extend this area for the purpose of holding a referendum.

Ann Skippers
Ann Skippers Planning
14 December 2015

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1.0 Introduction

This is the report of the independent examiner into the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan).

The Localism Act 2011 provides a welcome opportunity for communities to shape the future of the places where they live and work and to deliver the sustainable development they need. One way of achieving this is through the production of a neighbourhood plan.

The Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan is just the second neighbourhood plan in Huntingdonshire District to reach examination stage. The two villages lie side-by-side on the northern side of the River Great Ouse, about two miles west of St Ives and a similar distance from Huntingdon which lies to the west.

With a rich heritage including Houghton Mill, a traditional working water mill saved from demolition by local residents in the 1930s and the River Great Ouse and its meadows, the area is popular with visitors as well as residents.

2.0 Appointment of the independent examiner

I have been appointed by Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) with the agreement of the Parish Council, to undertake this independent examination.

I am independent of the qualifying body and the local authority. I have no interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan. I am a chartered town planner with over twenty-five years experience in planning and have worked in the public, private and academic sectors. Over the last two years I have examined a number of neighbourhood plans throughout England. I therefore have the appropriate qualifications and experience to carry out this independent examination.

3.0 The role of the independent examiner

The examiner is required to check¹ whether the neighbourhood plan:

- Has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body
- Has been prepared for an area that has been properly designated for such plan preparation

¹ Set out in paragraph 8 (1) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

- Meets the requirements to i) specify the period to which it has effect; ii) not include provision about excluded development; and iii) not relate to more than one neighbourhood area and that
- Its policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.

The examiner must assess whether a neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other matters set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

The basic conditions² are:

- Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan
- The making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development
- The making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority
- The making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, European Union (EU) obligations and
- Prescribed conditions are met in relation to the neighbourhood plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the neighbourhood plan.

Regulations 32 and 33 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) set out two basic conditions in addition to those set out in primary legislation and referred to in the paragraph above. These are:

- The making of the neighbourhood plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site³ or a European offshore marine site⁴ either alone or in combination with other plans or projects
- Having regard to all material considerations, it is appropriate that the neighbourhood development order is made where the development described in an order proposal is Environmental Impact Assessment development (this is not applicable to this examination as it refers to orders).

The examiner must then make one of the following recommendations:

- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum on the basis it meets all the necessary legal requirements
- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum subject to modifications or

² Set out in paragraph 8 (2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

³ As defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2012

⁴ As defined in the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007

- The neighbourhood plan should not proceed to a referendum on the basis it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

If the plan can proceed to a referendum with or without modifications, the examiner must also consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood plan area to which it relates.

If the plan goes forward to referendum and more than 50% of those voting vote in favour of the plan then it is made by the relevant local authority, in this case Huntingdonshire District Council. The plan then becomes part of the 'development plan' for the area and a statutory consideration in guiding future development and in the determination of planning applications within the plan area.

4.0 Compliance with matters other than the basic conditions

I now check various matters set out above in section 3.0 of this report.

Qualifying body

Houghton and Wyton Parish Council is the qualifying body able to lead preparation of a neighbourhood plan. This complies with this requirement.

Plan area

The Plan covers the parish of Houghton and Wyton which is coterminous with the Parish Council administrative boundary. HDC approved the designation of the area on 19 December 2012. The Plan relates to this area and does not relate to more than one neighbourhood area and therefore complies with these requirements. Figure 1 on page 2 of the Plan shows the area.

Plan period

The Plan covers a period of 21 years from 2015 – 2036. This time period appears on the front cover of the Plan and again in the Basic Conditions Statement, but paragraph 1.4 on page 1 of the Plan refers to 2014 – 2036. In the interests of consistency I recommend a modification later on in this report that brings these two dates in line with one other.

Excluded development

The Plan does not include policies that relate to any of the categories of excluded development and therefore meets this requirement.

Development and use of land

Policies in neighbourhood plans must relate to the development and use of land. Sometimes neighbourhood plans contain aspirational policies or projects that signal the community's priorities for the future of their local area, but are not related to the development and use of land. Where I consider a policy or proposal to fall within this category, I have recommended it be moved to a clearly differentiated and separate section or annex of the Plan or contained in a separate document. This is because wider community aspirations than those relating to development and use of land can be included in a neighbourhood plan, but non-land use matters should be clearly identifiable.⁵ Subject to any such recommendations, this requirement can be satisfactorily met.

5.0 The examination process

It is useful to bear in mind that the examination of a neighbourhood plan is very different to the examination of a local plan.

The general rule of thumb is that the examination will take the form of written representations.⁶ However, there are two circumstances when an examiner may consider it necessary to hold a hearing. These are where the examiner considers that it is necessary to ensure adequate examination of the issue or to ensure a person has a fair chance to put a case.

After consideration of the documentation and representations, I decided it was not necessary to hold a hearing.

I did however seek further written factual clarification of a number of issues. My queries addressed to both the Parish and District Councils are appended to this report. The responses I received from both Councils are of course a matter of public record. I have referred to these queries and the responses as appropriate throughout this report.

I am very grateful for the exemplary support and quick responses that the officers at HDC and representatives of the Parish have given me during the course of the examination.

I undertook an unaccompanied site visit to Houghton and Wyton and the surrounding area on 3 November 2015.

⁵ Paragraph 004 of Planning Practice Guidance

⁶ Schedule 4B (9) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

6.0 Consultation

A Consultation Statement (CS) has been submitted. This details the engagement activities carried out which included two surveys, events and exhibitions. In addition articles in newspapers and a local magazine, radio features, posters and a website have kept residents up to date.

A summary results leaflet on the second survey, the Issues and Options survey has been included as Appendix E and given that the CS indicates that 645 responses were received to this survey, the leaflet is an eye catching and interesting way to capture and importantly feed back those responses to the community.

Targeted engagement with various consultees and those attending village groups such as the Baby and Toddler Group have helped to ensure that widespread engagement has taken place.

Interestingly, this has included engagement with visitors to the area as well as residents and local businesses through an initial vision survey.

The pre-submission draft of the Plan was published for seven weeks from 14 November 2014 to 3 January 2015, sensibly giving a little bit more time over the Christmas period. Statutory and non-statutory consultees were notified by email and local people were notified through a flyer delivered to every household and notices in the village. Two drop-in surgeries were held and as well as copies on the website, hard copies were made available from the Parish Council and the Post Office. This mix of notification and availability of both online and hard copy version of the draft Plan is to be welcomed.

The CS summarises the responses to the pre-submission consultation, but takes a rather minimalist approach in places in explaining how they have been addressed.

Following on from the pre-submission period, the submission Plan six week consultation period from 19 June 2015 to 31 July 2015.

This attracted a number of representations which I have taken into account in preparing this report.

A representation⁷ on behalf of a local landowner suggests that the pre-submission period of consultation should be rerun as there is little evidence to suggest any consideration of sites beyond the village edges took place during the Plan's evolution and that the landowner in question has not been contacted. Another landowner⁸ also feels that there has been insufficient contact with landowners. This is a great pity, not least because of the importance of the sites that both these landowners have interests in. Nevertheless there seems to have been a fairly comprehensive campaign in

⁷ Pegasus Planning

⁸ Representation from Barford+co on behalf of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

publicising the Plan and whilst more can always be done, on balance, there seems to have been adequate opportunity for interested parties including land owners, to participate.

A representation from St Ives Town Council indicated that their comments on the pre-submission version have not been included in Appendix G of the CS. The CS should contain details of the persons and bodies consulted, explain how they were consulted, summarise the main issues and concerns and describe how these have been considered and, where relevant, addressed. As a result I sought confirmation from the Parish Council that a) the CS met this requirement and b) that all those responding have been included in it. I have received satisfactory confirmation of these points.

Some representations offered support for the Plan. Others sought additions for instance the inclusion of Houghton Hill as a character area or more on affordable housing. It is not my role to add to or improve the Plan, but rather to consider the submitted Plan against the basic conditions. However, I feel sure that the qualifying body will carefully consider these suggestions and incorporate them as appropriate in any future versions of the Plan.

I have also specifically referred to some representations, as I have done here in this section, and sometimes identified the person or organisation making that representation. However, I have not referred to each and every representation in my report. Nevertheless each one has been considered carefully and I reassure everyone that I have taken all the representations received into account during the examination.

7.0 Compliance with the basic conditions

National policy and advice

The main document that sets out national planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) published in 2012. In particular it explains that the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development will mean that neighbourhood plans should support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan and identify opportunities to use Neighbourhood Development Orders to enable developments that are consistent with the neighbourhood plan to proceed.⁹

The NPPF also makes it clear that neighbourhood plans should be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area. In other words neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. They

⁹ NPPF paras 14, 16

cannot promote less development than that set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies.¹⁰

On 6 March 2014, the Government published a suite of planning practice guidance. This is an online resource available at www.planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk. The planning guidance contains a wealth of information relating to neighbourhood planning and I have had regard to this in preparing this report. This is referred to as Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in this report.

The NPPF indicates that plans should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency.¹¹

PPG indicates that a policy should be clear and unambiguous¹² to enable a decision maker to apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. The guidance advises that policies should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence, reflecting and responding to both the context and the characteristics of the area.

Sustainable development

A qualifying body must demonstrate how a neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF as a whole¹³ constitutes the Government's view of what sustainable development means in practice for planning. The Framework explains that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.¹⁴

The development plan

The local planning authority for the area is Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC). The current development plan for the area and relevant to this examination consists of:

- The Core Strategy (adopted September 2009) which sets the spatial vision, objectives and strategic directions of growth to 2026 and
- Saved policies from the Local Plan 1995 and the Local Plan Alteration 2002.

The Core Strategy indicates that Huntingdonshire lies within the designated London/Stansted/Cambridge/Peterborough Growth Area and the southern part of the District lies in the Cambridge sub-region, but is still predominantly rural in character.

¹⁰ NPPF para 184

¹¹ *Ibid* para 17

¹² PPG para 041

¹³ NPPF para 6 which indicates paras 18 – 219 of the NPPF constitutes the Government's view of what sustainable development means in practice

¹⁴ *Ibid* para 7

Emerging policy context

The District Council is currently producing a new Local Plan for the area. The Local Plan will cover the period up to 2036 and, once adopted, will replace all current parts of the development plan including the Core Strategy 2009 and the saved policies of the Local Plan 1995 and the Local Plan Alteration 2002.

According to HDC's website, following targeted consultation in January 2015, work is progressing on the local plan and it is expected that the pre-submission local plan will be finalised and out to public consultation in Autumn 2016. The Plan has usefully taken account of the emerging Local Plan.

A representation¹⁵ points out that two proposals in the emerging Local Plan are of particular interest; one is SEL 3 which relates to about 254 hectares of land at Wyton airfield proposed for a mix of uses, but which lies outside the Plan area (although still with the potential for impacting upon the Plan area) and the other is SI 1.

In relation to SEL 3, a representation¹⁶ considers that the Plan should acknowledge the strategic development at Wyton airfield and plan positively to support it including consideration of brownfield sites which are close by and fall within the Plan area. The Plan might well have taken the opportunity to address such issues, but its omission of doing so does not mean that the Plan as currently presented would not meet the basic conditions.

SI 1 St Ives West is a proposed allocation of some 47 hectares of land for a mix of uses to the west of St Ives in the Stage 3 consultation draft Local Plan to 2036 which was the last full public consultation version of the emerging Local Plan. The site has been extended to 54 hectares in the targeted consultation draft of January 2015. Part of the proposed allocation falls within the Plan area.

A representation¹⁷ contends that the (neighbourhood) Plan should not proceed until there is an up to date adopted development plan on which the Plan can be based or tested against. Based on advice in PPG¹⁸ and a judgment handed down in a judicial review,¹⁹ it is widely accepted that a neighbourhood plan can be developed before or at the same time as the production of a local plan. I accept though that both the LPA and the qualifying body should work proactively together to minimise any conflicts.²⁰

European Union Obligations

A neighbourhood plan must be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations, as incorporated into United Kingdom law, in order to be legally compliant.

¹⁵ James Holden

¹⁶ Pegasus Group

¹⁷ Gladman Developments Ltd

¹⁸ PPG para ref id 41-009-20140306

¹⁹ Gladman Developments Ltd v Aylesbury Vale District Council [2014] EWHC 4323 (Admin)

²⁰ PPG para ref id 41-009-20140306

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment is relevant. Its purpose is to provide a high level of protection of the environment by incorporating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes. This Directive is commonly referred to as the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Directive. The Directive is transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

There is however no legal requirement for a neighbourhood plan to have a Sustainability Appraisal or Assessment.

In relation to the SEA Directive, a screening exercise has been carried out by Huntingdonshire District Council dated February 2015 and concluded that the Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and that an environmental assessment would not be required.

Natural England²¹ and English Heritage,²² now known as Historic England, agreed with this conclusion. However, the Environment Agency (EA)²³ expressed concern over flooding and indicated that both a SEA and a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) would be needed. After discussion, the EA agreed that if the Plan's scope was altered by including objectives and policies to avoid any additional less vulnerable, more vulnerable or highly vulnerable development in Flood Zones 2 and 3 as this would mean there would be significantly less flood risk to consider, then a SEA and Level 2 SFRA would "probably not be essential".²⁴ As these objectives and policies suggested by the EA would go beyond the stance of national policy, it appears that some lengths have been taken to avoid the need to undertake a SEA.

HDC has therefore concluded that a SEA is not needed provided appropriate amendments to the Plan are made. It appears that the submission plan (i.e. the version subject of this examination) incorporates such amendments and therefore by implication would seem not require a SEA based on the information before me.

However, representations from the Environment Agency, and indeed HDC, on various policies throughout the Plan suggest that various policies are changed from referring to "all vulnerable development" to more vulnerable and highly vulnerable to bring the policies in line with the NPPF.

The NPPF²⁵ sets out what PPG describes as strict tests to protect people and property from flooding.²⁶ It advocates a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development. Plans should be informed by an appropriate assessment of flood risk and ensure policies steer development to areas of lower flood risk as far as possible. Any

²¹ see response of 28 November 2014

²² see response of 26 November 2014

²³ see response of 27 November 2014

²⁴ see email from EA of 12 February 2015

²⁵ NPPF Section 10

²⁶ PPG para ref id 7-001-20140306

development in an area at risk of flooding should be safe for its lifetime taking account of climate change impacts. Finally flood risk to and from the Plan area should be managed so that flood risk is not increased overall and any opportunities to reduce flood risk are taken through, for example, the inclusion of policies on sustainable drainage systems.

PPG²⁷ explains that the sequential test steers new development to Flood Zone 1 (areas with a low probability of flooding). Where there are no reasonably available sites in Flood Zone 1, the flood risk vulnerability of land uses should be taken into account and sites in Flood Zone 2 (medium probability of flooding) should be considered, applying an exception test if necessary. Only if there are no sites in Flood Zones 1 or 2 should Zone 3 (high probability of flooding) be considered taking into account the vulnerability of land uses and applying the exception test if required. Land uses are categorised according to their vulnerability and further tables 'map' those categories against the flood zones to see where development is appropriate and where it should not be permitted.

If the comments from the EA and HDC (received as representations on the submission plan) were acted upon and these changes made, this would appear, on the face of it, to be at odds with the previous advice given by the EA referred to above in relation to whether a SEA is required or not. There is, by the way, no implied criticism of either organisation in my comments.

I have considered this issue carefully at length. I take the view that the basic condition of most relevance to this discussion is whether it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State. In relation to flooding, a number of policies in the Plan as it is currently presented do go beyond the stance taken in the NPPF on flooding.

Whilst they do so on the basis of specific advice from the EA, this advice has been given in relation to the need for a SEA rather than on the basis of any evidence that the requirements of national policy on flooding need to be exceeded in this specific locality.

Therefore I judge it to be appropriate for me to recommend modifications to bring the objectives and policies on flooding in the Plan in line with the NPPF. Whilst then I have reached the view that the submitted Plan can be said to be compatible with EU obligations in relation to the need for a SEA (as it accords with EA advice given at the screening stage), if the recommendations of this examination report were to be accepted, this then in my view would mean that it would be prudent for the local planning authority to explore again the question of whether a SEA be needed.

In reaching this view, I am also mindful that ultimately PPG advises that it is the responsibility of the local planning authority to decide whether the Plan is compatible with EU obligations.²⁸

²⁷ PPG para ref id 7-019-20140306

²⁸ *Ibid* ref id 11-032-20140306

It is also clear from the representations from the EA that there would be benefit in obtaining more and up to date information about flood risk. For me this illustrates well the circumstance envisaged by PPG²⁹ whereby the reasoning and evidence that informs the (emerging) Local Plan process may be relevant to the development of a neighbourhood plan and a collaborative approach between the bodies concerned should be taken.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora known as the Habitats Directive aims to protect and improve Europe's most important habitats and species. It identifies whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. If a plan is considered to be likely to have a significant effect on a European site then an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan for that site, in view of the site's conservation objectives, must be undertaken.³⁰ If it is considered that an appropriate assessment would be required, then a SEA will also usually be needed.

A number of European sites namely the Portholme Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ouse Washes SAC, Ouse Washes Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, Fenland SAC and Woodwalton Fen Ramsar site are located within 15km of the neighbourhood plan area.

HDC concludes in their screening report of February 2015 that an appropriate assessment is not required. Natural England agree that the Plan, alone and in combination with other relevant plans, is unlikely to have a significant effect on the European sites.³¹

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

The Plan has regard to fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the ECHR and complies with the Human Rights Act 1998. There is nothing in the Plan that leads me to conclude there is any breach of the Convention or that the Plan is otherwise incompatible with it.

Other Directives

I am not aware of any other European Directives which apply to this particular neighbourhood plan and in the absence of any substantive evidence to the contrary, I am satisfied that the Plan is compatible with EU obligations.

²⁹ PPG para ref id 41-009-20140306

³⁰ NPPF para ref id 11-029-20150209

³¹ Natural England email of 28 November 2014

8.0 Detailed comments on the Plan and its policies

In this section I consider the Plan and its policies against the basic conditions. Where I recommend modifications in this report they appear in **bold text**. Where I have suggested specific changes to the wording of the policies or new wording these appear in ***bold italics***.

General

The Plan is presented simply and clearly and is well written. It is an inviting document with attractive photographs that give a real flavour of the Parish. The layout used is easy to follow and the Plan is simple to navigate with a useful detailed contents page and index of policies.

However, I found some of the figures very hard to read and decipher and I note that HDC has offered to provide maps. Given that the Plan will be used in determining planning applications, it is critical that any maps, plans and figures in the Plan are easily read and interpreted. This is a helpful offer from HDC and one that I would urge the Parish Council to accept.

1 Introduction

This section sets the scene for the Plan well explaining what the purpose of the Plan and where it fits into the hierarchy of planning documents.

The explanation in paragraph 1.10 and the blue box on 'how to read this document' on page 2 which provide very clear and succinct guidance and are very useful to include in the Plan.

There are one or two minor issues that would benefit from revision in the interests of accuracy, as some provisions of the Localism Act came into effect in 2011, and in the interests of consistency, as the front cover of the Plan highlights that the Plan period commences in 2015 rather than 2014 as I have already highlighted.

In addition paragraph 1.11 and the contents page whilst very welcome in principle do not tie up with the section headings or numbers in the submission version of the Plan.

Finally, paragraph 1.11 refers to site specific allocations for new development whereas paragraph 1.5 states the Plan does not allocate sites. Indeed the Plan contains some other references to "allocated sites" throughout, but the Plan itself does not allocate any sites. As a result I sought clarification on this point from the Parish Council who confirm that any mention of allocated sites is an oversight as whilst a call for sites was made, a decision was taken before the pre-submission version of the Plan not to include

any allocations. In the interests of consistency and accuracy, these minor and easily made glitches should be remedied.

I therefore recommend the following modifications:

- **Change the date from “April 2012” to “2011” at the end of paragraph 1.1 on page 1**
- **Change the date from “2014” to “2015” in paragraph 1.4**
- **Ensure that the contents page, section headings and numbers as well as figures together with paragraph 1.11 on page 3 are consistent and tie up with each other and accurately reflect the Plan’s contents**
- **Remove any references throughout the Plan to allocated sites or similar as appropriate** (please note that this recommended modification is not repeated at every instance and so applies to the Plan as a whole)

2 Local context

This is a very interesting and informative section which provides context on the Parish and highlights some of the key issues of importance and concern to the community.

It usefully contains a plan of the Conservation Area on page 6. However, I found this quite hard to read and therefore I recommend that this useful and important plan is included at a larger scale and that the Conservation Area boundary is better defined for clarity. Given that the Plan indicates the Conservation Area has recently been enlarged, the most up to date plan should, of course, be included.

Following my query on the latest position for a proposal for the Great Ouse Valley and Washes to become an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) referred to in paragraph 2.22 of the Plan, this paragraph should be deleted or be moved to a separate aspirational section of the Plan or to a separate document. This is because the most recent advice from Natural England is that this aspiration is unlikely to be considered until 2018/19. Therefore in the interests of accuracy and to avoid the Plan being open to accusations of being misleading, this should not be included as it is currently presented in the Plan.

I note that there are a number of references throughout the Plan to the proposed AONB and all references should be deleted for the reasons given above.

There is also a need to update the contents of paragraph 2.29; it might be useful to consider how this part of the Plan can be ‘future proofed’ so that it does not become out of date quickly. For instance this paragraph could explain the successes of the 2013, 2014 and, hopefully 2015, music festivals, and then indicate it is hoped that more will be held in the future.

Paragraph 2.30 on page 8 refers to the “arduous” and “dangerous” nature of the access to and from the village; this may well be the case, but unless there is evidence to support these claims they are probably best expressed as a perception or opinion. For instance the paragraph could be rephrased to indicate that “the community feels...” or similar.

Paragraph 2.38 on page 10 repeats the information given in an earlier paragraph (2.6 on page 4). Given that paragraph 2.6 sits well and contains a little more information, I suggest that paragraph 2.38 is deleted; either way the repetition should be removed. A quick general check of the Plan before preparing the referendum version with a view to removing any repetitious elements may well be of benefit.

I therefore recommend the following modifications:

- **Improve the clarity of Figure 2 on page 6 and ensure it is the most up to date plan of the Conservation Area**
- **Delete paragraph 2.22 or revise and update the wording and move this issue to a separate aspirations section or document**
- **Remove all other references to the proposed AONB throughout the Plan** (please note that this recommended modification is not repeated at every instance and so applies to the Plan as a whole)
- **Update paragraph 2.29 on page 8**
- **Make it clear in paragraph 2.30 on page 8 that the claims about the access are opinions or add in the evidence which supports these claims**
- **Delete paragraph 2.38 on page 10 or ensure that any repetition is removed between this paragraph and earlier ones**

3 Vision and objectives

Starting off with eleven challenges for the Parish, the Plan articulates an unusual, original and clearly locally driven vision which is to be welcomed. The vision is:

“We are an active, thriving, dynamic and cohesive community; proud to live in this special landscape which we are keen to share with others.”

The vision is then further developed in subsequent paragraphs which explain the key ways in which the vision might be achieved.

The only paragraph that gives me some concern is paragraph 3.8 on page 13. This states that “as an infill village for housing, our needs will be for a limited number of quality designed houses aimed at both the younger and older members of the

community.”. It seems to me that this tries to set policy in this section and that it might be premature to do this in this part of the Plan; therefore I recommend this paragraph be deleted.

This section then articulates 17 objectives relating each one to the relevant policy in the Plan. I have the following comments on the objectives.

Objective 1 seeks to restrict any further loss of grazing or agricultural land. The NPPF supports a prosperous rural economy and promotes the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses. It also indicates that whilst the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land should be taken into account, if development of agricultural land is necessary then areas of poorer quality land should be used in preference to land of a higher quality.³² This objective then is too restrictive as it does not take account of the possibility of diversification (which is recognised in objective 9) or the quality of the land concerned. Therefore it should be modified to address this.

I note that Natural England particularly supports objectives 1 (notwithstanding my comments above), 4 and 5.

Objective 17 refers to flooding. I note that there is support from the Environment Agency for this particular objective. Given the issue over flooding that has been rehearsed already in my report, this objective should be worded to be more flexible.

Objective 13 refers to Houghton Grange; I have recommended that the section of the Plan that relates to Houghton Grange be deleted or moved to a clearly identified and separate aspirational section of the Plan or a separate document. Therefore objective 13 should be deleted.

I also notice a small typo in paragraph 3.1: it should be “the” instead of “he” in the last bullet point challenge.

A representation³³ queries the accuracy of visitor numbers quoted in paragraph 3.11. Whilst I do not have any evidence before me whether the figure cited is accurate or not, and I note it is an estimate, it is important that information contained within the Plan is accurate and does not mislead. Therefore this should be checked and modifications made as appropriate.

The following modifications are therefore recommended to ensure the Plan meets the basic conditions:

- **Delete paragraph 3.8 on page 13**

(modifications continued on next page)

³² NPPF paras 28 and 112

³³ Representation from HDC

- **Reword objective 1 to read: “To protect and enhance the green spaces of importance within the parish and to *resist the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land wherever possible.*”**
- **Delete objective 13 (consequential amendments will be needed)**
- **Reword objective 17 to read: “To steer new development to areas of lower flood risk as far as possible.”**
- **Correct typo in paragraph 3.1; “the” instead of “he”**
- **Check the figure of 150,000 visitors cited in paragraph 3.11 for accuracy and make any necessary changes**

4 Village limits/built up area

Policy HWNP1

This policy introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the built up area of Houghton and Wyton. An “indicative” built up area is shown on Figure 3 on page 17 (Incorrectly referred to as Figure 4.1 in paragraph 4.5 incidentally). I sought to clarify whether it was the intention of the qualifying body to define their own built-up area boundary in the Plan, whether a built-up area boundary is defined in any adopted development plan and whether the emerging Local Plan seeks to propose such an area and if so, the differences, if any, between these areas.

The Parish Council advise that they do seek to define a built up area; indeed this is what is indicated in the Basic Conditions Statement.

I am advised that village limits were defined in the Local Plan 1995 and that the policies in that Local Plan relating to village limits remain extant. The Core Strategy³⁴ takes the approach of defining what might constitute a built up area in words rather than defining a boundary on a plan. This approach seems to be continued in the current iteration of the emerging Local Plan which would have a written definition of what the built up area is and rely on a case by case interpretation.

Therefore paragraph 4.2 seems incorrectly to state that the village limits have been retained in the Core Strategy.

There is no reason why a neighbourhood plan cannot define its own built up area boundary. In this case however, that approach differs from the one taken in the development plan. In these circumstances I would expect to find some supporting evidence or at least explanation of how the built up area has been defined in relation to

³⁴ Core Strategy para 5.15

the strategic approach and why it has been defined as it has in this locality. Paragraph 4.5 attempts to do this but only in a very limited way.

Whilst representations variously advise me that the built up area boundary is too generous or overly restrictive, HDC, rightly I think, consider that defining a boundary might be counterproductive.

From my observations at my site visit, the built up area boundary shown on Figure 3 did not make much sense to me insofar it did not seem to me to form an obvious boundary in the absence of any solid explanation for it. In addition the inclusion of an open area to the west of Houghton Grange seemed to me to be at odds with the community's desire to ensure separation between Houghton and St Ives. Given that PPG³⁵ advises that proportionate and robust evidence should support the choices made and the approach taken, I am not convinced that this policy is underpinned satisfactorily by evidence.

The supporting text to the policy quotes from the Core Strategy and the emerging Local Plan. Paragraph 4.3 incorrectly quotes from paragraph 5.15 of the Core Strategy. Whilst the definitions between the two are not necessarily at odds with each other, they do differ.

In addition given that the supporting text quotes extensively from an emerging Local Plan there is no guarantee that the emerging Local Plan will remain intact or be adopted in its current form. Whilst I consider it good practice for the Plan to have taken account of emerging policy, it is a harder argument for it to rely on something that may well change or even be deleted.

Furthermore when I consider the wording of the policy, it introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the built up area, but the NPPF's presumption applies everywhere and is not qualified or restricted in that way and so the policy takes a narrower approach than national policy.

Outside the built up area i.e. the countryside, rural activities and quiet tourism are supported by the policy, but there is little to define what type of activities this phrase might or might not include which gives rise to some uncertainty. In addition the NPPF's support for a prosperous rural economy does not differentiate between quiet and noisy tourism for example although I accept the NPPF supports tourism which respects the character of the countryside and that this could arguably be quiet tourism.

The issue of flooding has already been rehearsed earlier in this report and I do not intend to discuss it at every juncture. However, paragraph 4.6 does not appear to reflect PPG accurately.

Therefore given the lack of evidence for this policy and the very limited explanation of the built up area boundary, its unclear definition on the map and the stance of the

³⁵ PPG para ref id 41-040-20140306

policy itself, in order for the basic conditions to be met, I recommend deletion of the policy.

- **Delete Policy HWNP1 and its supporting text**

5 Natural environment

This section contains a number of figures identifying various sites and areas that subsequent policies refer to.

Figure 4 on page 19 identifies a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and County Wildlife Sites (CWS). Unfortunately I find this figure hard to read and to distinguish between the different designations. In the interests of clarity, this figure should be made more legible by being included at a larger scale and with different and clearer site designations. There is no need to include the Conservation Area designation on this figure.

Figures 5 and 6 on pages 19 and 20 refer to common land. Common land has a particular meaning and the law restricts the kinds of activities that can be carried out on commons. Following my query about these two areas, confirmation has been given to me that both areas are common land. It is therefore not necessary for these areas to be specifically identified or included in the policies and therefore these two figures should be deleted.

- **Make Figure 4 more legible and simpler**
- **Delete Figures 5 and 6 showing common land**

Policy HWNP2

This policy seeks to do two things; it seeks to resist development that would have a harmful impact on the SSSI, CWSs and common land and to enhance and extend the wildlife sites and habitats to create better connectivity between them. I have already referred to the two areas of common land.

The conservation of biodiversity makes a significant contribution to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF and other guidance on designated sites and protected species distinguishes between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites so that protection is commensurate with their status and appropriate weight is given to their importance and wider contribution.³⁶

³⁶ NPPF para 113

The first element of the policy seeks to resist development that would have an adverse impact on these three categories of sites except in exceptional circumstances. This has two implications; firstly the policy does not offer any protection for biodiversity other than on the three areas of land specified and secondly, whilst the NPPF refers to exceptional circumstances³⁷ it does so in relation to major development in national parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, none of which apply to this Plan area. In relation to SSSIs, the NPPF³⁸ does refer to exceptions but then goes on to qualify that. The policy in introducing this exception to CWSs and common land goes beyond the stance national policy takes. Therefore the policy does not adequately recognise the hierarchy of designated sites or the principles in the NPPF sufficiently.

The second element of the policy seeks to support development that would enhance the habitats and extend the wildlife sites and enhance connectivity. Whilst on the face of it this is a positive stance to take, the effect of it might be to support otherwise unwanted development if it facilitated these aims and this is probably not the intention of the policy. The intention of the policy has regard to the NPPF in that impacts on biodiversity should be minimised and net gains should be provided wherever possible.

Therefore to ensure that regard is given to the NPPF and that the policy will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, it is recommended that the policy be reworded.

- **Policy HWNP2 should be reworded as follows:**

“All new development should protect and, wherever possible, enhance biodiversity and establish, enhance or extend ecological corridors and the connectivity between them.

Development on land within or outside a SSSI likely to have an adverse effect on a SSSI interest, either individually or cumulatively, should not normally be permitted. Where an adverse effect is likely, permission should only be granted where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweigh both the impacts that it is likely to have on the site’s features and any wider impacts on the national network of SSSIs.”

- **Consequential amendments to the supporting text will be necessary**

Policy HWNP3

Coalescence between settlements is a recognised planning issue. It is important to prevent neighbouring settlements merging into one another and for local identity and distinctiveness to be reinforced and promoted. The Plan seeks to identify a “local settlement gap” on the east of the Plan area and to the west of St Ives. It identifies the

³⁷ NPPF para 116

³⁸ NPPF para 118

proposed gap clearly on Figure 7 on page 22. The effect of the policy would be to protect the specific area or feature of the land in question although I recognise the policy is carefully worded so as not to exclude development per se, it sits within a section titled “natural environment”. This is clearly a matter of great importance to the local community and one that has a long history.

My request for clarification included providing me with a copy of the High Court judgment³⁹ and the HDC Officer Position Statement in relation to St Ives West dated 29 September 2014.

Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy (as the most recent adopted plan for the area) identifies that, as part of the St Ives Spatial Planning Area, provision will be made in the following “general” location for homes “in a significant greenfield development to the west of the town” i.e. St Ives. The precise area is not identified on any plan, but a directional arrow on a map shows the direction of growth. The principle then of development in this general location is established by the Core Strategy, but no further detail has emerged. The Court case referred to above quashed a subsequently produced urban design framework for the area. The Officer Position Statement explains that decisions about which specific parcels of land should be developed “should be determined through the full Local Plan process”.

The emerging Local Plan, referred to in the supporting text, seeks to allocate St Ives West (Policy S1 1) for a mix of uses. The land identified as the proposed settlement gap clearly falls within this proposed allocation and is the easternmost part of the proposed allocation that falls within the Parish following changes to the Parish boundary a few years ago.

The basic conditions refer to the need for neighbourhood plans to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan. I consider Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy to be such a policy and HDC have confirmed that this is their view too. I consider Policy CS2 to be of most relevance to this discussion, but have also taken Local Plan 1995 Policy En15 which deals with open spaces and gaps for protection into account as the notation for that policy shown on the proposals map extends partway along the proposed local settlement gap in the Plan.

HDC rightly point out that the Core Strategy predates the NPPF. I consider that the Core Strategy and Policy CS2 have regard to the NPPF and are consistent with it.

A balance must be struck between the Government’s support for localism and its drive to provide more housing. I have carefully considered this issue and have, on balance, reached the conclusion that the identification of a proposed gap cannot be considered to meet the basic conditions.

This is for a number of reasons. First of all I do not consider the proposal to be in general conformity with Core Strategy Policy CS2. PPG⁴⁰ sheds light on what is meant

³⁹ [2013] EWHC 1476 (Admin)

⁴⁰ PPG para ref id 41-074-20140306

by “general conformity”; it is whether the neighbourhood plan policy or proposal supports and upholds the general principle that the strategic policy is concerned with, the degree of conflict if any between the neighbourhood plan policy or proposal and the strategic policy, whether the neighbourhood plan provides an additional level of detail or a distinct local approach without undermining that policy and the rationale for the approach taken and the evidence to justify that approach.

In this case although the Core Strategy policy does not specify or allocate a site, the designation of the gap, land known as the BBSRC field, would not uphold the general principle in Core Strategy Policy CS2. Therefore designation of the gap would prevent, or, at the very least, make it harder for the District Council to plan for the strategic needs of the District, particularly given various constraints including flooding in the area. As a result I consider the proposed gap cannot be said to be in general conformity with the relevant strategic policies in the development plan or pay sufficient regard to national policy and advice or would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

A representation⁴¹ on behalf of the landowner also goes further by explaining that the BBSRC field, the gap, is an essential part of the delivery not only of Core Strategy Policy CS2, but also of Policy CS9 which deals with strategic green infrastructure enhancement.

This proposal does not provide an additional level of detail or a distinct local approach which does not undermine the strategic policies.

However, I do recognise and fully accept that it is important to ensure that the village does not merge with St Ives. I noted the desire to ensure separation between the two settlements in my comments on Policy HWNP1 earlier in this report. Whilst there is little evidence in the Plan to support the identification of the BBSRC field as a settlement gap as, for example, a feature of the landscape or for its visual importance and so on (and this would have been particularly helpful given that part of the proposed gap contains various buildings on it which I understand have been used for research and development in the past), it seems to me that the intent of the policy can be supported. The supporting text⁴² describes this as “to protect the village character and distinctiveness by retaining and enhancing a clear and obvious open land gap between the village and the neighbouring town of St Ives”.

I therefore consider that whilst the designation of the proposed gap on a map would not support the strategic development needs of the District, would pay insufficient regard to the NPPF and would undermine the potential to achieve sustainable development, a more general policy that might be termed an ‘anti-coalescence’ policy would be regarded as appropriate and in line with the basic conditions.

As a result I recommend that Figure 7 identifying a specific area of land is deleted and Policy HWNP3 be reworded. These modifications are to be found on the next page.

⁴¹ Barford+co on behalf of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

⁴² Page 21 of the Plan

- Delete Figure 7 on page 22
- Reword Policy HWNP 3 as follows:

“Development proposals should respect the individual and distinct identities of the village of Houghton and the town of St Ives. Development will not be permitted if, individually or cumulatively, it would result in the loss of the visual and physical separation of these two settlements or lead to their coalescence.”

Policy HWNP4

This policy seeks to designate three areas of Local Green Space (LGS). These are shown on Figure 8 on page 23 of the Plan. Once again I personally find it hard to distinguish the extent of the areas from the small scale of the figure and the lack of distinctive colours used and this should be remedied in the interests of clarity. In addition the name of each area on Figure 8 does not coincide with descriptions of each area that follow. This should also be remedied in the interests of clarity.

The NPPF⁴³ is clear that local communities have the opportunity of designating LGS, but that such a designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. It lists a number of criteria that such a designation needs to meet. It further states that identifying land should be consistent with local planning of sustainable development.

Taking each of the three areas in turn: the playing field or recreation ground is in the heart of the village, close to the community it serves. The supporting text explains that a number of regular activities take place there as well as events. It is described as a meeting place and is clearly special to the local community and meets the requirements of the designation.

The Elms Gardens is described as a natural setting to The Elms, a large private building that appears to have been converted into apartments. It is renowned for its snowdrops and aconites and other flora and fauna and has some historical significance.

A number of representations point out that the Gardens are in private ownership and there is no public access. PPG⁴⁴ advises that land without public access can be considered and gives the example of green areas valued for their wildlife, historic significance and so on. Such a designation does not confer any rights of public access over what exists at present. Nevertheless the policy for managing development within a LGS should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.

I consider that the Plan does not provide sufficient demonstration of why the Elms is special to the local community. Given that such a designation may also prevent

⁴³ NPPF paras 76, 77, 78

⁴⁴ PPG para ref id 37-017-20140306

development usually associated with a private residence coming forward, this needs to be satisfactorily demonstrated.

In respect of both these areas, I note that most of the areas fall outside the indicative built up area shown on Figure 3, but a part of both falls inside the boundary. I have recommended deletion of Policy HWNP1 and so the point is perhaps of little relevance, but should in the future a built up area be defined it would seem sensible to ensure consistency.

The third area proposed is described as the BBSRC field. This area seems to be exactly the same as the area proposed as a local settlement gap under the previous policy.

The NPPF is clear that designating any LGS should be consistent with local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and services. PPG⁴⁵ explains LGS designation should not be used in a way that undermines the aim of plan making to identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs. PPG⁴⁶ explains that the area in question should not be an extensive tract of land and that “blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements” will not be appropriate. Had the built up area boundary been retained in an earlier policy, this area would have been adjacent to that settlement boundary.

The supporting text details the history of the field and quotes from a number of texts and other sources in support of this. Therefore the historical significance and beauty of the area are given as main reasons, together with the importance of the land as a buffer. However, part of this site has buildings on it. I have already found in the discussion of the previous policy that designating this land as a settlement gap would not meet the basic conditions. The same arguments apply here. Overall there is insufficient and persuasive evidence to support a LGS designation and I am also mindful that LGS should not be used to undermine plan making or as a back door to prevent development.

Whilst I have found that only one of the areas meets the criteria for designation as a Local Green Space as outlined in the NPPF,⁴⁷ the wording of the policy requires amendment to bring it in line with the wording in the NPPF and to update the relevant figure number for accuracy. Subject to these modifications Policy HWNP4 accords with the basic conditions.

- **Delete The Elms and the BBSRC field as Local Green Spaces from Policy HWNP4 and undertake consequential amendments to the supporting text and figure**
- **Revise Figure 8 on page 23 so that the area of Local Green Space retained is clearly shown and easily distinguishable from the background colour wash (or remove the colour wash) and ensure that the name of the LGS is the same as in the text (or vice versa) (modifications continue on next page)**

⁴⁵ *Ibid* para ref id 37-007-20140306

⁴⁶ *Ibid* para ref id 37-015-20140306

⁴⁷ NPPF paras 76, 77 and 78

- Replace the sentence “...and will be strongly protected from development:...” in Policy HWNP4 to “...and will be protected from development other than in very special circumstances:..”
- Change the reference in Policy HWNP4 from “Figure 4.3” to “Figure 8” (or ensure consistency)

Policy HWNP5

This short policy seeks to protect and enhance the greens and verges in the built-up area of the Parish. Its preamble rightly identifies such areas as important both for their contribution to the character of the Parish and its distinctiveness and for biodiversity.

Pages 27 to 32 identify the more significant of these areas and considerable work has gone into then identifying, describing and photographing these areas. I requested a map showing the areas and have been provided with detailed maps of each area. At my site visit these did seem to be inconsistently identified and I saw a number of other areas and verges that usefully could be subject to this policy. As a result, on balance, and I am conscious of the work that has gone into producing numerous maps for my benefit, it might be better for the policy and its preamble to consider listing, describing or using the mapping so that the policy is clear about which areas it applies to. Any references to common land should be deleted in line with the earlier discussion in this report.

The policy is worded so that *any* development that achieves protection is supported and so, similar to a point made earlier in the report, the policy needs some reworking to avoid supporting development that achieves the policy’s objectives, but would clearly be unacceptable in other ways.

It also refers to greens and verges within the built up area; firstly this has been recommended for deletion, but secondly and in any case some of the identified areas are not within the built up area.

The policy also indicates the need to work in partnership with landowners which include the National Trust. This is useful and should be placed in the supporting text rather than form part of the policy itself as this is not a development and use of land matter.

Therefore in order to meet the basic conditions, the policy should be reworded.

- **Reword Policy HWNP5 as follows:**

“The green areas and verges identified on Figure X [or on pages XXXX] are valued for their biodiversity and contribution to the village’s character and distinctiveness. Development that protects and enhances the openness and

biodiversity of these areas will be supported. Development that would detract from the special characteristics or biodiversity of these areas will be resisted.”

- **Consequential amendments to the supporting text and a decision on how best to identify the areas concerned will be needed**

Policy HWNP6

Biodiversity is rightly identified as a key component of the Parish’s location next to the River Great Ouse. Both the NPPF and the Core Strategy recognise the importance of biodiversity.

Policy HWNP6 seeks to protect and enhance the landscape and biodiversity of the Parish which is in principle to be welcomed and will help to achieve sustainable development. However the wording of the latter part of the policy appears to accept “significant loss of biodiversity as part of development” and its replacement elsewhere on the same development site.

The policy approach taken by Policy HWNP6 is, in my view, at odds with the NPPF’s approach. This is because the NPPF conserves and enhances biodiversity and if significant harm resulting from development cannot be avoided (and this includes location on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated or compensated for, it states permission should be refused.⁴⁸ Therefore the wording of the policy needs alteration so that it takes account of the NPPF and is therefore able to meet the basic conditions.

It may also be useful to cross check any changes to this policy with any changes to Policy HWNP2 and to ensure there is no overlap or repetition. In addition paragraphs 5.16 and 5.17 offer fairly short, selective quotes from the NPPF and it might be useful to add more explanation.

- **Reword Policy HWNP6 as follows:**

“Development is expected to protect and enhance biodiversity assets including species-rich meadows, the River Great Ouse and areas of semi-natural habitat associated with the river. If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for, permission will be refused.”

- **Consider any overlap with (the modified) Policy HWNP2 and amend supporting text as necessary**

⁴⁸ NPPF para 118

Policy HWNP7

The supporting text indicates that this policy seeks to introduce a presumption against development that reduces grazing and agricultural land and is therefore similar to objective 1 discussed earlier in this report.

The NPPF supports a prosperous rural economy and promotes the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses. It also indicates that whilst the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land should be taken into account, if development of agricultural land is necessary then areas of poorer quality land should be used in preference to land of a higher quality.⁴⁹ I indicated the objective was too restrictive and recommended a modification to it. Likewise the supporting text at paragraphs 5.27 and 5.28 on page 35 are at odds with the NPPF and given the introduction of a presumption against development that results in the loss of such land and the introduction of time scales, these paragraphs are far too onerous and restrictive and should be deleted.

However, the policy wording itself does not reflect the accompanying text (recommended for deletion) or the NPPF sufficiently and adds a further criterion about benefits outweighing the retention of land in agricultural use. Nevertheless the sentiments expressed in the policy would help to achieve sustainable development and with suitable rewording can be retained.

With regard to other more minor matters, paragraph 5.24 on page 34 refers to Figure 5.5, but the figure is titled Figure 9 and so this should be amended in the interests of accuracy. This seems to be a commonly occurring theme and I suspect that there is a wider point here about the need to ensure that Figure numbers tie up with references in the supporting text and policy throughout the Plan. Therefore any recommendations throughout this report that detail a change to a figure number or similar should be interpreted as simply ensuring that everything ties up. Given that once again I find Figure 9 hard to read, it might be better to simply refer in text to the latest classifications for reasons of clarity and to ensure the figure is not out of date quickly.

Paragraph 5.26 quotes correctly from the NPPF, but refers to a paragraph in it that deals with the use of minerals. As a result it is not appropriate to include this reference in the Plan. Paragraph 5.28 incorrectly refers to Policy HWNP6.

- **Amend text in paragraph 5.24 on page 34 to refer to “Figure 9” rather than “Figure 5.5”**
- **Ensure that Figure 9 is up to date or refer to the most recent classifications in the supporting text and avoid the need for a figure as this could be out of date quickly (modifications continue on next page)**

⁴⁹ NPPF paras 28 and 112

- Delete paragraphs 5.26, 5.27 and 5.28 on page 35
- Reword Policy HWNP7 as follows:

“Development of the best and most versatile agricultural land (as defined in the NPPF) will normally be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that significant development of agricultural land is necessary and no other land of a poorer agricultural quality is available.”

6 Tourism

Policy HWNP8

This is a well-worded and clear policy that supports tourism development in line with national policy and it will help to achieve sustainable development. It therefore complies with the basic conditions and no modifications are recommended.

Policy HWNP9

Tourist accommodation is the subject of this policy. It seeks to support new tourist accommodation where there no harm would be caused to the village road network or to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and setting of listed buildings and where pedestrian and cycle access is available. In principle the support this policy offers to tourist accommodation aligns with national policy and will help to achieve sustainable development. However, the three criteria together represent a relatively high hurdle for development to jump over and therefore I recommend that the wording of the policy is modified so that it includes more flexibility so that the high hurdle it presents does not hinder the sustainable growth of this sector in the Parish.

HDC indicate that paragraph 6.9 incorrectly cites Policy LP11 of the emerging Local Plan. Given the stage the emerging Local Plan is at, this Plan cannot be read alongside it. Therefore the Parish Council should be satisfied that this policy (as reworded) is what they intended.

- Reword Policy HWNP9 as follows:

“Proposals for new or expanded accommodation for tourists will be supported provided that the following criteria are met:

- ***the impact on the existing road network would be acceptable; and***
- ***pedestrian and cycle access to services in the village is provided wherever possible and ideally via footpaths and cycle routes; and***

- ***there would be no adverse impact on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area or the setting of any listed building in the Parish or the countryside.***

Policy HWNP10

This policy seeks to resist the change of use of tourist accommodation into permanent dwellings unless it can be demonstrated that the property is no longer viable as a going concern over a period of 18 months. There is little evidence to illustrate what the issues might be beyond reducing the stock of visitor accommodation and little justification for requiring 18 months marketing beyond representing two trading seasons. On the face of it this policy is too inflexible and onerous. Therefore it is recommended that the policy be reworded.

Paragraph 6.12 seems to incorrectly cite Policy LP11 of the emerging Local Plan. Given the stage the emerging Local Plan is at, this Plan cannot be read alongside it.

- **Reword Policy HWNP10 as follows:**

“The change of use of tourist accommodation to permanent dwellings will only be permitted when it can be reasonably demonstrated that the tourist accommodation is no longer viable. Evidence may include details of the business case and marketing of the property as a going concern at a market price over a period of months normally taken to be representative of two trading seasons.”

7 Community infrastructure

Policy HWNP11

Community facilities that meet the recreational, educational, social and cultural needs of the community are supported through this policy. The supporting text rightly recognises that needs can change over time and seeks to ‘future proof’ such provision with maximum flexibility.

The second paragraph refers to the use of private facilities for community needs; this is not a development and use of land matter, but one of management. Therefore this paragraph should be moved to the supporting text.

The policy also prevents such development being located in Flood Zones 2 or 3 (with the exception of sports changing room facilities). This accords with the EA’s requirement in relation to SEA, but goes beyond national policy and guidance and therefore should be

deleted to ensure that the policy takes account of national policy and guidance. The modifications recommended are:

- **Delete the second paragraph from Policy HWNP11 and include it as part of the supporting text**
- **Delete the third paragraph from Policy HWNP11**

8 Developer contributions for community infrastructure

Policy HWNP12

CIL is usefully included in the Plan. The policy recognises that 25% of receipts from CIL will be given to the Parish and that priorities will be drawn up and reviewed regularly. However, the policy merely repeats the current factual situation and that the Parish Council will continue to work in partnership with others on infrastructure projects. As it is currently written the policy does not relate to a development and use of land matter and is aspirational. Therefore whilst it would be appropriate to retain this in the Plan as an aspiration it is not a policy that meets the basic conditions.

- **Delete or change Policy HWNP12 into a ‘community aspiration’ or similar ensuring that it is clearly differentiated from the policies in the Plan**
- **Consequential changes will need to be made to paragraph 9.1 which refers to this policy**

9 Traffic and transport

Policy HWNP13

In response to a query, the Parish Council have confirmed that there is a typo in paragraph 9.4: the first “formal” should be informal.

The supporting text to Policy HWNP13 includes, at paragraph 9.6 on page 41, a reference to a planning application at Houghton Grange. This is site specific and does not seem to have any wider relevance to this section. Its inclusion could be regarded as misleading and therefore it should be deleted.

Policy HWNP13 does a number of things; firstly any new development along the A1123, A141 and B1090 are to demonstrate a need (in traffic terms) for any new access points along these roads. It seems that there is a preference to use existing access points and to upgrade these if needs be. Secondly, the policy requires new buildings to be positioned so that natural screening can be maximised. Thirdly, any trees, hedges or

ditches are to be retained except where a new access is made. Finally the policy applies to developments of three or more dwellings and any other development providing 500 square metres or more of new floor space.

The policy appears to apply within and outside the Plan area and of course it cannot apply outside the Parish boundaries. It then sets an onerous task for any prospective developers or applicants as well as on the decision making authorities to make a judgment that might well be unnecessary to undertake. It seems to cover matters that would usually form part of a transport assessment. The NPPF⁵⁰ is clear that developments that generate a significant amount of movement should be supported by a transport statement or assessment. This then leads me onto the thresholds of development that the policy introduces. It is not clear to me where this threshold has come from or why it is appropriate for Houghton and Wyton. There are often technical solutions that can satisfactorily overcome highway or traffic movement concerns.

For a number of reasons then the policy and its supporting text does not provide the practical framework for decision-making that the NPPF requires. I am not in a position to suggest a rewording of this policy to bring it in line with the basic conditions based on the information before me. Therefore the only element of the policy that can be retained is paragraph three.

- **Delete Policy HWNP13 with the exception of paragraph three**
- **Consequential amendments will need to be made to the supporting text**

Policy HWNP14

This policy sets out car parking standards for new residential development explaining that there are high levels of car ownership and given public transport in the area, it is reasonable to expect cars will be a main mode of transport for residents and visitors. In principle the setting of a local parking standard is supported by national policy. I also recognise that in certain areas other means of transport cannot always be practical. However, there is little explanation of the rationale for setting the standard as it is put forward and therefore no sense of what impact this would have on the deliverability and viability of new housing or for the village. In addition there may be other solutions to the provision of parking that this policy would discourage from coming forward. Therefore the 'standards' element of the policy should be deleted as it would not support the achievement of sustainable development.

A second element to the policy is the support given to additional car parking for the village. I assume this refers to public car parking. It would be appropriate to retain this element of the policy.

⁵⁰ NPPF para 32

I also notice that the photograph of parking in the village centre on page 43 of the Plan is identified as “Figure 8.1”. First of all other photographs are not identified in this way and secondly this numbering is inconsistent with the other figures in the Plan. This should be remedied in the interests of consistency and clarity. Whilst I have pointed it out here (and I may have missed other instances), this comment does of course apply throughout the Plan and further checks of presentation should be made before the next version of the Plan is finalised. Recommended modifications are on the next page.

- **Delete the first paragraph and all parking standards from Policy HWNP14**
- **Retain the last sentence of the policy and insert the word “*public*” after “...additional...” and before “...car parking...”**
- **Ensure that the identification of photographs and figures is consistent**
- **Consequential amendments to the supporting text will be needed**

Policy HWNP15

Sustainable modes of transport such as footpaths and cycleways are encouraged by this policy. The supporting text provides a persuasive rationale for the policy’s ambitions. The policy will help to achieve sustainable development. As it meets the basic conditions no modifications to the policy itself are recommended.

However, the supporting text only allows new developments not to provide new footpaths and cycleways where “it is physically not possible to make such provision...” in paragraph 9.14 on page 44. It is also important that such provision does not adversely affect the viability and deliverability of development; so it is necessary to add a further sentence to this paragraph to reflect this and to offer a greater degree of flexibility.

- **Add “...or demonstrably unviable...” after “...physically not possible...” and before “...to make such provision..” to paragraph 9.14 on page 44**

10 Flood risk and drainage

Policy HWNP16

I appreciate that flooding is of major concern to the community. This issue has been discussed earlier in the report in relation to the requirement for SEA. Anglian Water and the EA have made various suggestions for changes to the wording of this policy.

In light of the issues raised generally and more specifically in representations, I consider that the policy should be revised to bring it in line with national policy and guidance and to take account of representations from Anglian Water, the EA and HDC.

- **Delete the first paragraph from Policy HWNP16**
- **Reword the (existing) second paragraph of Policy HWNP16 to: “Development will only be permitted in areas benefitting from defences where the sequential and exception tests are passed and residual risk of flooding has been considered and it can be demonstrated that the development will be safe.”**
- **Amend the (existing) third paragraph to read: “Any development which would reduce the *flood plain* storage capacity of a site will not be permitted unless an alternative storage facility is provided to compensate within the site on a level-for-level and volume-for-volume basis. *Reference should be made to the SFRA maps which define the extent of the functional flood plain and any such facilities should be approved by the Environment Agency or other appropriate body.*”**
- **Amend the (existing) fifth paragraph to read: “Replacement dwellings and buildings *will only be permitted in areas at risk of flooding if it can be demonstrated they will be substantially safer and will reduce flood risk, taking into account the effects of climate change.*”**
- **Amend the (existing) sixth paragraph to read “All developments will be expected to demonstrate they have followed the surface water management hierarchy to ensure that infiltration *and other methods of surface water disposal are considered and provided for before ahead of maintaining any connection to existing surface water sewers.*”**
- **Replace the word “applications” in (existing) eighth paragraph with “permissions”**
- **Consequential changes may be needed to the supporting text**

11 Business

Policy HWNP17

This is a long and complex policy that addresses many different issues. As well as support for new or expanding businesses, strong encouragement is given to start-up businesses. The loss of retail or leisure facilities is resisted unless alternative appropriate provision can be made. The impact of businesses is then considered. Proposals are then said to be favourably considered if they address one of three criteria. Finally, development along the A1123, A141 or B1090 is considered.

The NPPF is clear that the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas should be supported. In addition the retention of local services and community facilities is promoted. Essentially the general thrust of the policy is in line with national policy, but there are certain elements that are too inflexible or overly restrictive. In addition the policy is complex and so in the interests of providing a practical framework, I suggest it is reworded.

Paragraph 6.12 seems to incorrectly cite Policy LP11 of the emerging Local Plan. Given the stage the emerging Local Plan is at, this Plan cannot be read alongside it.

In order for the policy to meet the basic conditions, the following modification is recommended:

- **Reword Policy HWNP17 as follows:**

“Proposals for new or expanding businesses will be supported provided that they are appropriate to their rural setting and respect the character of the village, the countryside and wider landscape including views in and out of the area. Any such use will need to ensure that its impact on light, noise and air is acceptable.

Proposals that provide suitable space for start-up or incubator businesses, develop the Parish’s agricultural base or increase retail space in the village centre are particularly encouraged.

The loss of existing retail or other community services and facilities will be resisted unless alternative or enhanced provision is made elsewhere in suitable and accessible locations in the Parish or it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer viable.

New development along the A1123, A141 or B1090 should seek to retain existing trees, hedges and ditches wherever possible to protect the rural setting.

Any new development should not increase flood risk. Planning applications for development within the Plan area must be accompanied by a site-specific flood risk assessment in line with the requirements of national policy and advice, but may also be required on a site by site basis based on locally available evidence.”

Policy HWNP18

This policy supports the provision of retail premises such as farm shops in certain circumstances. As the Plan recognises farm shops allow farmers to sell direct to the public which is of benefit to the farmer and the consumer providing a supply of locally

produced fresh food. Planning permission is not always necessary for farm shops or other retail outlets selling produce produced on associated land if, for instance an existing building is used for the sale of goods mainly produced on the farm itself. This is usually a judgment made by the local planning authority based on the particular circumstances of the unit.

This policy contains four criteria that would need to be met for retail units to be supported. The first two relate to what I regard as matters of fact and degree and will largely determine whether planning permission is required, the third relates to the impact on the viability of existing shops in the village; this is not generally regarded to be a planning consideration as the market will determine which might survive and the fourth criterion relates to flooding.

Therefore the conclusion I reach is that this policy is not appropriate for inclusion in the Plan and in order for the Plan to meet the basic conditions, it should be deleted.

- **Delete Policy HWNP18 in its entirety and its supporting text**

12 Housing

Policy HWNP19

The preamble to this policy deals essentially with the needs of the community and the type of housing to be provided. The policy encourages small scale windfall residential development so long as it meets a number of criteria.

Taking each of these criteria in turn, the first one stipulates no more than 4 – 5 dwellings or the plot should be no larger than 0.15 hectare. There is little evidence to indicate why these thresholds have been selected or what the impact might be of introducing such a threshold. To do so could well thwart the achievement of sustainable development.

The second seeks to prevent development in Flood Zones 2 or 3; an issue already discussed in this report at length.

The third criterion expresses a preference for one or two bedroom properties built to Lifetime Homes standards. The NPPF provides for a wide choice of homes. Given the information on demographics and affordable housing put forward this can be justified in terms of encouraging smaller units provided there is some flexibility, but the wording lacks clarity.

The Government has also created a new approach to setting technical standards for new housing development. A Written Ministerial Statement (WMS)⁵¹ made it clear that

⁵¹ Written Ministerial Statement of 25 March 2015

neighbourhood plans cannot set out any additional local technical standards or requirements relating to the construction, internal layout or performance of new dwellings. Optional new technical standards can now only be required through Local Plan policies. The policy therefore cannot require dwellings to be built to Lifetime Homes standards.

The fourth criteria relates to sheltered accommodation for older people, but there are many other types of housing that can also address the needs of older people. This then unnecessarily limits the options and would, in my view, be likely to prevent sustainable development coming forward although I appreciate the sentiment of this criterion. In my suggested modifications I have therefore widened this requirement to maximise options in providing homes for older people.

The fifth criterion concerns the effect on the Conservation Area and listed buildings. This would be a usual planning consideration in any case and it tends, in my view, to confuse the issue when essentially the policy is about the type of housing development the Plan will support.

The last criterion supports self-build which is in line with current Government thinking.

Therefore it will be apparent that the policy needs rewording in order for it to meet the basic conditions. This should also address the concerns raised by HDC.

In addition, paragraph 12.3 refers to Policy HWNP1 and its accompanying figure which I have recommended for deletion and so consequential amendments will be needed.

Representations raise points about the accuracy of paragraph 12.5 and the availability of more up to date information pertaining to paragraph 12.7. These matters should be checked and amended as appropriate in the interests of accuracy.

- **Reword Policy HWNP19 as follows:**

- ***“Residential development on windfall sites in the villages that meets local needs will be supported. In particular, the provision of one or two bedroomed units and housing that meets the needs of older people is particularly encouraged. Self-build units will be supported on appropriate sites.”***

- **Consequential amendments to the supporting text will be needed including ensuring that paragraph 12.14 is brought into line with national policy and advice and reflects recommended changes to the issue of flooding made throughout this report**

13 Design of new development

Policy HWNP20

This policy is long and complex as it refers to the design of new development and outlines nine criteria for new development to address. As the preamble to the policy recognises the NPPF places emphasis on the quality of development and good design is regarded as a key aspect of sustainable development. Alongside this, there is support for the reinforcement and promotion of local distinctiveness. The policy ties in with the objectives of the Core Strategy and saved Local Plan policies support this.

Reference is made in the supporting text to Appendix A which contains information about the character areas identified for the Parish. Whilst an unusual approach has been taken to the definition of these character areas as it is usual to cover the whole built-up area or Parish rather than select very small areas, this information does, in my view, help to articulate those aspects which make up the local distinctiveness of the Parish and are important to the community.

However, some 'tidying up' of the policy is needed for it to provide the practical framework national policy seeks. In addition there needs to be more recognition of flexibility and there is little benefit in repeating requirements that would be the preserve of the local planning authority such as the requirement for a landscaping scheme to be implemented before occupation. Not only would this fall to the local planning authority to police, it is also an unreasonable requirement bearing in mind planting seasons and so on.

Finally as mentioned in the discussion of the previous policy, the Government has created a new approach to setting technical standards for new housing development. Therefore references to energy efficiency should be removed.

I have therefore recommended the policy be reworded to take account of these concerns to bring it in line with the basic conditions. This will also address the concerns of representators.

Paragraphs 13.2 and 13.3 refer to the emerging Local Plan and Building for Life standards. As indicated before, it may be better not to rely on emerging policies. However, for the avoidance of any doubt, the references to Building for Life standards can be retained.

Finally, paragraph 13.11 on page 54 refers to Policy HWNP21. There is no such policy in the submission version of the Plan and I assume this should be a reference to Policy HWNP20.

The suggested modifications are shown on the next page.

- **Reword Policy HWNP20 as follows:**

“New development will be supported where it can demonstrate that the following criteria are all met:

- *it respects the character or appearance of the village and its heritage assets including the Conservation Area and the setting of the Great Ouse Valley*
 - *it responds positively to the heritage and distinctive features of any Character Area in which it is situated and pays particular attention to the site’s topography and height, scale, spacing, layout, orientation and materials*
 - *it is of a high quality design and, where appropriate, is of a distinctive and individual character*
 - *it retains and incorporates, where possible, existing natural features such as trees, hedgerows and ponds*
 - *it takes any opportunity available to provide safe, accessible and well-connected footpath and cycle routes to the village centre, and*
 - *where the development is located at the edge of the settlement it takes account of, and respects, the character of adjacent countryside by providing landscaping and / or developing at a lower height as appropriate to reflect its fringe location.”*
- **Consequential amendments to the supporting text will be needed**
 - **Change reference in paragraph 13.11 from “Policy HWNP21” to “Policy HWNP20”**

14 Existing development sites – Parish needs and intentions

This section refers to two sites: Houghton Grange and Beer’s Garage site. From the information in the Plan both sites have the benefit of planning permission for up to 90 dwellings and four dwellings respectively. The section sets out what can be described as the Parish’s aspirations for both these sites under a heading of “Parish Intention”.

These aspirations are not formulated as site specific policies for the two sites. However, it is not particularly clear what the status of the requirements which are set out are. Given that these sites appear to have the benefit of planning permission, I take this section to be one of aspiration. It is not appropriate to be included as part of the Plan in this format. This section should therefore be moved to a separate and clearly labeled separate section or appendix of the Plan or should be removed in its entirety. This is to ensure that there is no doubt about the status of the contents of this section, particularly in view of paragraph 1.0 and the ‘how to read this document’ section at the start of the Plan.

In addition, paragraph 14.7 refers to sui generis uses and it is not clear to me what this refers to; it seems to be a superfluous reference in any case. This should be remedied in the interests of clarity.

Incidentally paragraph 14.13 on page 57 seems to refer to Beer's Garage site but sits within the Houghton Grange section. This should be remedied in the interests of clarity.

In order to meet the basic conditions, the following modifications are recommended:

- **Move section 14 in its entirety to a separate section (which does not appear as part of the Plan) or appendix of the Plan which is clearly labeled 'community aspirations' or delete in its entirety**
- **Clarify or remove the reference to sui generis uses in paragraph 14.7**
- **Move paragraph 14.13 so that it sits within the correct section**
- **Consequential changes may be required**

15 Monitoring and community action plan

Monitoring is an important planning activity and whilst it is not a requirement for neighbourhood plans, despite the lack of any detail, the intentions set out in this section are a welcome addition.

It is not clear to me what paragraph 15.4 refers to. Paragraph 15.5 refers to a Community Action Plan contained in Appendix B.

The section also refers to the community right to bid and lists three assets of community value. This seems to be for information purposes and so can be included in a separate appendix or clearly labeled separate section of the Plan, but should be removed from the Plan itself as this does not relate to development or use of land matters.

- **Clarify paragraphs 15.4 and 15.5 further**
- **Move the part of section 15 headed "Community Right to Bid" in its entirety to a separate section (which does not appear as part of the Plan) or appendix of the Plan which is clearly labeled or delete in its entirety**

Glossary

A short glossary is usefully included.

Appendix A

Contains information about each of the Character Areas mentioned in connection with Policy HWNP20.

Appendix B

This is the community action plan which covers non planning matters that the Parish Council wish to capture as a result of its work on neighbourhood planning.

Appendix C

Contains a list and map of the listed buildings in the Parish. Again I find the plan hard to read and consideration should be given to whether this can be included in a more legible way. There is no need for this appendix to be included in the Plan, particularly given it does not contain any specific policies on heritage assets and the list may well become out of date over the Plan period. However, I do not consider it necessary for me to make a recommendation about this appendix in relation to the basic conditions. However, if retained it would be useful to add a proviso that information should always be checked with the relevant authority.

9.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

I am satisfied that the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan, subject to the modifications I have recommended, meets the basic conditions and the other statutory requirements outlined earlier in this report.

I am therefore pleased to recommend to Huntingdonshire District Council that, subject to the modifications proposed in this report, the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan can proceed to a referendum. However, it will be noted that I have also suggested that the local planning authority reconsiders the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment if the Plan is modified in accordance with these recommendations. In this regard please refer to the section on Strategic Environmental Assessment for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

Following on from that, I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan area.

I see no reason to alter or extend the Plan area for the purpose of holding a referendum and no representations have been made that would lead me to reach a different conclusion. I therefore consider that the referendum area be based on the Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan area approved by Huntingdonshire District Council on 19 December 2012.

Ann Skippers
Ann Skippers Planning
14 December 2015

Appendix 1 List of Documents specific to this Examination

Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan Submission Plan May 2015

Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan Consultation Statement May 2015

Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Development Plan Basic Conditions Statement May 2015

Core Strategy September 2009

Huntingdonshire Local Plan Part One adopted December 1995

Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration adopted December 2002

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 Targeted Consultation 2015

Response to Clarification Questions from the Examiner from HDC and from the Parish Council and documents referred to or linked into in those responses

Officer Position Statement on St Ives West dated 29 September 2014

Judgment [2013] EWHC 1476 Admin

List ends

Appendix 2 Clarification Questions from Examiner

Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan Examination Questions of clarification from the Examiner to the PC and HDC

Having completed an initial review of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP), I would be grateful if the Parish and District Councils could kindly assist me in answering the following questions which either relate to matters of fact or are areas in which I seek clarification or further information.

1. Section 4 and Policy HWNP1 of the Plan refer to a built-up area.
 - a) Paragraph 4.3 quotes from the Core Strategy and then the emerging Local Plan. Please indicate where the emerging Local Plan references are from i.e. policy and/or page number for both the quotes on page 15 and the reference to the policy for building in the countryside on page 16
 - b) Can you please confirm whether paragraph 4.4 is also a quote from the emerging Local Plan (it seems to read this way) and if so, again please point me in the direction of where I might find this in the source document
 - c) The built-up area is shown on Figure 3 of page 17 of the Plan. Please confirm the following:
 - Whether Figure 3 is intended to define a built-up area as the figure is titled “indicative”
 - Whether a built-up area boundary is defined in any adopted development plan document and, if so, please let me know which development plan(s) and send me a copy of the defined and adopted built-up area(s) plans
 - Whether the emerging Local Plan seeks to propose a built-up area and if so which version and send me a copy of the area
 - Point out any differences between the adopted plan built-up area, the emerging Local Plan built-up area and the HWNP proposed (if this is the case) built-up area
2. Section 4 and Policy HWNP1 refer to the threat of flooding. Paragraph 4.6 makes reference to the strategy for growth and directing less, more and highly vulnerable land uses away from flood zones 2 and 3. Although the paragraph states this is in accordance with PPG and advice from the Environment Agency, it does not seem to reflect PPG advice that I can find. Therefore please provide me with the relevant extracts or para numbers from PPG and the advice received from the EA to support this paragraph in the Plan and the stance of Policy HWNP1 and other policies in the Plan that prevent development in Flood Zones 3 and 3.
3. The Plan makes references to a proposal for the Great Ouse Valley and Washes to be an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Please could you update me on the latest position?

4. Section 5 refers to two areas of common land; the first along the A1123 and the second along Splash Lane. Common land has a particular meaning and the law restricts the kind of activities that can be carried out on commons. Please confirm that these two areas (shown on Figure 5 and 6 of the Plan) are 'common land' within the usual meaning and provide the register entry for each site (which HDC should hold). If these areas are not 'common land', given there is no description or reference to them in the Plan, please provide me with short factual information on each site including ownership details if possible. The Group may wish to take advice on this from the LPA or their advisers.
5. The supporting text to Policy HWNP3 (local settlement gap) refers to:
 - a) The extent of the St Ives Spatial Planning Area in the Core Strategy. Please confirm whether the SPA has been identified on a plan and if so provide me with a copy of the plan or signpost me to where I might find it
 - b) Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy. Please can HDC confirm whether they regard this policy as a strategic policy
 - c) Please provide me with a copy of the court case judgment referred to in the Plan
 - d) The Plan makes reference (page 21) to previous Inspector's comments relating to HDC Local Plans. Please provide me with the requisite sections of these reports so I can see which Local Plans and policies are being referred to and exactly what the Inspector said
6. There are references throughout the Plan to the Great Ouse Valley as an area of green (space) enhancement in both the Core Strategy and emerging Local Plan. As far as I can see the Core Strategy refers to this area as an area of green space enhancement whilst the emerging LP refers to Strategic Green infrastructure enhancement; am I correct?
7. The preamble to Policy HWNP5 lists a number of significant verges and greens. Please could these be identified on a map(s) clearly labeled so that I can see their location and the extent of these areas? As an aside I am generally finding the figures hard to read and distinguish from the background colour wash and so given this personal difficulty please could this be borne in mind in providing this information to me?
8. Is the agricultural land classification data in Figure 9 on page 34 the most recent available?
9. There are some references throughout the Plan to "allocated sites" (for example paragraph 5.28 on page 35). Please clarify what this refers to given the Plan does not allocate sites itself?
10. Is there a typo in paragraph 9.4 on page 41 of the Plan? Should the sentence about new development taking the opportunity to replace an existing formal access point with a new formal access point be the replacement of an existing *informal* access point?

11. The representation from St Ives Town Council indicates that their comments on the pre-submission version have not been included in Appendix G of the Consultation Statement. The Consultation Statement should contain details of the persons and bodies consulted, explain how they were consulted, summarise the main issues and concerns and describe how these have been considered and, where relevant, addressed. I seek confirmation that the Consultation Statement meets this requirement (Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and a comment from the Parish Council about whether all those responding have been included in it.

It may be the case that on receipt of your anticipated assistance on these matters that I may need to ask for further clarification or that as the Examination progresses other queries may come to light.

With many thanks.

Ann Skippers
24 September 2015