

Matter 2 – Housing Growth and Spatial Strategy

Issue 3 – Settlement Hierarchy

- 17 The St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01) maps areas of development that have taken place since the Local Plan Review 1994, but remain in the Green Belt. It confirms that (for the purpose of the assessment), the defined settlement areas should therefore remain as shown in the Local Plan Review 1994.

Q1 What is the justification for this approach given the period of time which has elapsed? Does the assessment adequately reflect the form, role and function of existing settlements in the area?

What is the justification for this approach given the period of time which has elapsed?

- 1.1 Paragraphs 6.2 to 6.6 of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01) set out the methodology for how the defined settlement areas were selected:

6.2 Settlement areas were clearly defined within the Local Plan Review 1994. However, address data and the Green Belt Review Part 1 shows that development since 1994 has encroached beyond defined settlement areas into the Green Belt. Furthermore, new developments have been built within the Green Belt itself, including Highfield Park, Napsbury Park, Harperbury Hospital and Hanstead House.

6.3 Given that development of existing settlements has encroached into the Green Belt, the first stage of the study was to consider how to map and define the settlement areas in the District. GIS data layers were used to map the settlements, and included the Green Belt and Address Gazetteer Data. The results of this exercise are shown in Map 1 below.

6.4 Map 1 is a useful illustration of the impact of growth on the Green Belt and shows that settlements have increased in size over time, such as St Albans; Bricket Wood and London Colney, and also that new developments have been built within the Green Belt, as referenced above.

6.5 It is important to note that settlements have grown since 1994. In particular, development sites on the edge of settlements have encroached into the Green Belt. These areas remain washed over and are located in the Green Belt. The NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Therefore, the decision was made that (for the purposes of this study) the defined settlement areas should remain as shown for the Local Plan 1994. This is to ensure that any settlement area defined for this study is not confused with the future

consideration of potential alterations to the Green Belt boundary which may emerge through the plan-making process.

6.6 It should be noted that the Local Plan 1994 did identify Green Belt settlements, as shown in paragraph 3.8 above. These are settlements washed over by Green Belt. These settlements will be included in this study because they are considered to be established and have historically been defined as settlements in the District.

- 1.2 As stated in paragraph 6.5 it was not the purpose of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01) to define the Green Belt boundaries for the district. By implication it was also not the purpose of the Settlement Hierarchy to define settlement boundaries. Its purpose, as stated in paragraph 1.2 of the Study is to “*provide robust and objective evidence to inform the development of the spatial strategy and strategic policies of the emerging Local Plan*”. It sets out the hierarchy of settlements in the District, which in turn informs the development of the spatial strategy in conjunction with other evidence documents, including the Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023 (GB 02.02).
- 1.3 For the avoidance of doubt, there are four areas where the settlement boundaries are proposed to be amended to reflect the changed form of development on the ground since 1994, as set out in detail in answer to M3 I2 Q9. However, the changes are inconsequential to the outcomes of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01)¹, and were themselves considered in Part 2 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study (LPCD 13.02).
- 1.4 The new developments listed in paragraph 1.2 of the Study (Highfield Park, Napsbury Park, Harperbury Hospital and Hanstead House), were assessed in Part 2 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study (LPCD 13.02).

Does the assessment adequately reflect the form, role and function of existing settlements in the area?

- 1.5 Yes, the assessment adequately reflects the form, role and function of existing settlements in the area.
- 1.6 In Section 3 of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01), a review of other evidence base documents prepared at the time of drafting the Settlement Hierarchy Study is undertaken. Notably the study reviews the South West Herts Economic Study Update (September 2019)

¹ The change to the Green Belt and settlement boundary at Highfield and Cell Barnes, St Albans would increase the population score for St Albans but have no other impact as the settlement already scored maximum points for each category (and there are no employment areas in the extension, and no bus route exclusive to that area). As St Albans city already has the highest score the impact is of no significance.

The changes to the Green Belt and settlement boundaries in Wheathampstead, Bricket Wood and How Wood are small in scale and contain no scoring features (other than a very small increase in population that would not change the overall score).

(EMP 01-02) and the South West Hertfordshire Retail and Leisure Study (September 2018) (LCRT 04.01).

- 1.7 Whilst the methodology in Section 6 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01) does not reference or directly consider the findings of the evidence listed above (as it focusses on the accessibility of day-to-day facilities that produce most trip-generation), had they been factored into the scoring system it would not have materially affected the conclusion of the Study given the limited retail, leisure and employment uses outside of the three largest settlements in the district (St Albans City, Harpenden and London Colney), and role of St Albans City as a regional centre within South West Hertfordshire, and Harpenden as a town centre functioning independently of St Albans City².

² Paragraphs 3.18 to 3.21 of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01)

Q2 Are the scores used in the settlement hierarchy assessment accurate and robust?

- 2.1 Yes, the scores used in the settlement hierarchy assessment are accurate and robust. They identify the accessibility of day-to-day facilities (essential services and the ability to access employment locally and by cycling and public transport), thus identifying the overall sustainability of each settlement in the district and its position in the hierarchy. They also use population size as a measure, which is also robust, and the methodology used to calculate the population is reasonable³.
- 2.2 The majority of the scores in the settlement hierarchy assessment are accurate. However, in reviewing the scores in order to respond appropriately to this Question, a small number of errors of detail were identified as below. None of these minor errors point to a necessary change to the position in the settlement hierarchy:

Settlement	Cycle route score	Bus route scores	Services and Facilities Audit Scoring	Commentary
St Albans	Typographical error as the score should be 8 instead of 5			No material impact on the settlement hierarchy as St Albans is already the highest scoring settlement
Redbourn			Redbourn has a leisure centre as well as all four key services and so this score should be 6 instead of 5	No material impact on the settlement hierarchy as given characteristics of Redbourn and overall score it is still considered to be Tier 4 Large Village.

³ The population data is modelled as settlement boundaries do not coincide with any statistical boundaries used by the Office of National Statistics. By definition it cannot be completely accurate, but it is based on reasonable assumptions and is, therefore, robust.

Settlement	Cycle route score	Bus route scores	Services and Facilities Audit Scoring	Commentary
Bricket Wood		Bricket Wood has three bus routes operating at least once per hour Monday to Saturday. This score should be 3 instead of 1.		<p>Bricket Wood (a Tier 5 Medium Sized Village) has a corrected overall score of 10.4, which is the same as Wheathampstead (a Tier 4 Large Village), both having similar populations.</p> <p>However, Bricket Wood does not have any local employment sites in the draft Local Plan (see Table 5.1 of the draft Plan) (unlike Wheathampstead) and so it is still considered to be a Tier 5 Medium Sized Village).</p>
Chiswell Green		Chiswell Green has two bus routes operating at least once per hour Monday to Saturday. This score should be 2 instead of 1.		<p>Chiswell Green (a Tier 5 Medium Sized Village) has a corrected overall score of 10.3, which is only 0.1 less than Wheathampstead (a Tier 4 Large Village).</p> <p>However, Chiswell Green does not have any local employment sites in the draft Local Plan (see Table 5.1 of the draft Plan) (unlike Wheathampstead) and so it is still considered to be a Tier 5 Medium Sized Village).</p>

Settlement	Cycle route score	Bus route scores	Services and Facilities Audit Scoring	Commentary
Sandridge			Sandridge has an independent convenience food shop not recorded in the study. This score should therefore be 3 instead of 1.	Sandridge has a corrected overall score of 7.2 giving it the highest score of the Tier 6 Green Belt Villages (but lower than any of Tier 5 Medium Sized Villages). The Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023 (GB 02.02) recommends that Sandridge be washed over by the Green Belt. Taking into account the above Sandridge is still considered to be a Tier 6 Green Belt Village.

Settlement	Cycle route score	Bus route scores	Services and Facilities Audit Scoring	Commentary
Smallford		Smallford has five bus routes operating at least once per hour Monday to Saturday. This score should be 5 instead of 3.		Smallford has a corrected overall score of 7.0. However, a total of 5 points derive from the fact that five frequent bus routes pass through Smallford as it is on the main road between St Albans and Hatfield. The Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023 (GB 02.02) recommends that Smallford be washed over by the Green Belt. Taking into account the above, and the very limited local services other than frequent bus services, Smallford is still considered to be a Tier 6 Green Belt Village.

Q3 How have the scores and baseline evidence been used to determine which settlements fall within the proposed tiers? Is the settlement hierarchy justified, effective and sound?

How have the scores and baseline evidence been used to determine which settlements fall within the proposed tiers?

- 3.1 As set out in paragraph 6.30 in the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01), *the scores are the first step in identifying a baseline settlement hierarchy for the District. Validation of the quantitative assessment is required to assess the scores against settlement profiles and known relationships between settlements within and outside of the District.*
- 3.2 Paragraph 6.59 (and its associated table) in the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01), shows how the baseline evidence has informed the categorisation of settlements into tiers, taking into account the role of each settlement in the district, and the scores:

[...] a revised baseline settlement hierarchy for St Albans has been proposed, based on the findings of the analysis of each settlement in the District, which fall into the study sample. The table below identifies the new settlement tiers identified, provides a simple definition of the tier and sets out which settlements fall into each tier:

Tier Name	Key Characteristics of Tier	Settlements within the Tier
City/Large Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest population size. • Sub-regional centre for employment and high-order services such as secondary education, retail and leisure. • Offers choice and variety of sustainable transport provision and connectivity 	St Albans
Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerably lower population size compared to City/Large Town • Provision of employment and high order services such as secondary education, retail and leisure. • Offers public transport provision and connectivity. 	Harpenden

Tier Name	Key Characteristics of Tier	Settlements within the Tier
Small Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third largest population size • Some employment provision and high order services including retail and leisure, but no secondary school. • Bus routes and cycle provision but lacking connectivity via train. 	London Colney
Large Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller population size compared to Small Town • Self contained settlements with provision of key services and employment sites. • A functional relationship to Harpenden for higher order services. • Availability of bus routes to provide public transport offer. 	Redbourn Wheathampstead
Medium Sized Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller in size to the Large Villages • Provision of key services • Functional relationship with St Albans and Watford for high order services. • Availability of train and bus routes to provide public transport offer. 	Bricket Wood Chiswell Green How Wood Park Street/Frogmore
Green Belt Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washed over by the Green Belt • Smaller population size compared to the Medium Sized Villages • Some or few key services. • Generally functional relationship to settlements in higher tiers within the 	Sandridge Colney Heath (three parts) Lea Valley Estate Radlett Road (Frogmore) Smallford Sleepshyde Gustard Wood

Tier Name	Key Characteristics of Tier	Settlements within the Tier
	<p><i>hierarchy which provide key services and higher order services.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generally some or limited availability of bus routes to provide a public transport offer.</i> 	
Green Belt Hamlet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Washed over by Green Belt</i> • <i>Population less than 250 residents</i> 	<p><i>Folly Fields</i> <i>Annables</i> <i>Kinsbourne Green [sic]⁴</i></p>

- 3.3 In addition, Part 2 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study (LPCD 13.02) concludes for Napsbury Park (on page 11) that:

Napsbury Park provides good leisure, recreation facilities, and good bus connections to London Colney and St Albans.

The site does provide limited recreational facilities and also has a permanent bus route which provides connectivity to London Colney and St Albans. As such the site has close similarities to settlements defined, in Part 1 of the Settlement Hierarchy Study, as a Green Belt Village.

- 3.4 Consequently, Napsbury Park is designated as a Green Belt Village in the draft Local Plan.

Is the settlement hierarchy justified, effective and sound?

- 3.5 Yes, the settlement hierarchy is justified, effective and sound. It has been applied to guide the selection of sites such that development is focussed towards to the most sustainable locations in relation to the size of the development (i.e. larger developments are focussed on the settlements which are the most 'sustainable' locations due to their access to services, transport and community facilities).
- 3.6 The minor corrections of detail set out in M2 I3 Q2 do not change the above.
- 3.7 Although Bricket Wood and Chiswell Green now have higher scores comparable to Large Villages, they lack the employment facilities of Large Villages and are, therefore, less appropriate locations for larger scale developments.
- 3.8 Whilst Sandridge does have a range of key services, thus raising its overall score to one comparable with a Medium-Sized Village, the Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023

⁴ Annables, Kinsbourne Green is one hamlet, not two as suggested by the table following paragraph 6.59 in the Settlement Hierarchy Study

(GB 02.02) recommends that Sandridge be washed over by the Green Belt, due to its openness. Therefore, it is appropriate that it is categorised as a Green Belt Village.

- 3.9 Smallford has a high score due to being on the main road between St Albans and Hatfield and having five bus services that run at least hourly as a result. However, it lacks other key services (in particular a small convenience / food shop), and as stated in paragraph 6.47 of the St Albans City and District Council Settlement Hierarchy Study Part 1 Baseline (LPCD 13.01), travel out of the settlement would be necessary on a regular basis. The Stage 2 Green Belt Review 2023 (GB 02.02) also recommends that Smallford be washed over by the Green Belt, due to its openness. Therefore, it is appropriate that it is categorised as a Green Belt Village.