

Local Plan Panel Meeting	
Meeting Date	03 September 2020
Report Title	Settlement Hierarchy Study
Cabinet Member	Cllr Mike Baldock, Cabinet Member for Planning
SMT Lead	James Freeman
Head of Service	James Freeman
Lead Officer	Aaron Wilkinson
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and the Settlement Hierarchy Study at Appendix I.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Local Plan Review (LPR), and as per paragraphs 15 and 20 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council will need to provide a positive vision for the future of Swale and set out a strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of the development. This must be done with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.
- 1.2 Defining and implementing a settlement strategy is, in part, assisted by the identification of settlement tiers, forming a settlement hierarchy, which help guide development to sustainable locations with good access to services, facilities and employment opportunities. A settlement hierarchy study has subsequently been prepared which reviews the tiers/hierarchy set out within the adopted Local Plan and considers whether any changes are required. This is available at Appendix I to this report.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Swale Rural Sustainability Study 2011 carried out a similar review which contributed to the settlement hierarchy set out on page 45 of the adopted Local Plan (also available in Appendix I). It splits the Borough's settlements into 6 tiers based on their access to services, facilities and employment opportunities.
- 2.2 This settlement hierarchy study re-assesses the sustainability of the settlements within the Borough to understand how our towns, villages and smaller settlements function currently. A full methodology has been set out in section 3 of the study. To summarise, it carries out an audit of the services and facilities which are present in each settlement, splitting these out by key services and higher-order services (those which would likely only be found in the largest and most sustainable settlements).

- 2.3 It then assesses the accessibility of the settlements by considering the distance and ease of access to the nearest main town and the level of public transport provision. This is because, for many smaller settlements, higher-order facilities and opportunities are unlikely to be present but it is the ease and ability to access such facilities elsewhere which becomes important in determining settlement sustainability.
- 2.4 Taking these outputs into account, the study then suggests a settlement hierarchy and summarises the key findings for each tier. The settlement hierarchy proposed does not recommend a change to that in the adopted Local Plan. It does however acknowledge that development in certain tiers would need to be accompanied by a rise in general sustainability through improvements to, or additional, services, facilities and employment opportunities.
- 2.5 The settlement hierarchy will form part of the evidence base used to determine a settlement strategy for the LPR.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 The proposal, therefore, is that Members note the content of the Settlement Hierarchy Study.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 Although a settlement hierarchy is not explicitly required by the NPPF, the identification of settlement tiers is a well-established principle of plan-making which contributes to defining and implementing a settlement strategy and follows the sustainable development theory.
- 4.2 There would be no benefit to Members disregarding the content of the Settlement Hierarchy Study given that it contributes to evidence base relating to the development of a settlement strategy for the LPR. Therefore, there are no realistic alternatives.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 No consultation has been undertaken or is proposed. However, this report will be used with other evidence to draft the content of the LPR. When the LPR is consulted on at the Regulation 19 stage, consultees will be able to make comments on this document if they wish to.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposal would align with: Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all.

	Priority 2: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges. Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone.
Financial, Resource and Property	None identified at this stage – the work has been carried out within the Planning Policy budget.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Sustainability	The new Local Plan will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	The new Local Plan will require a full community impact assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Settlement Hierarchy Study

8 Background Papers

8.1 The Swale Rural Sustainability Study 2011

<http://www.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Swale-Rural-Sustainability-Study-with-covers.pdf>