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BAWDESWELL PARISH COUNCIL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DRAFT BRECKLAND LOCAL PLAN

PART 1 – PREFERRED DIRECTIONS AND PART 2 – EMERGING SITE OPTIONS

Bawdeswell Parish Council is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the current drafts of the above papers as part of the ongoing consultation process.

While appreciating the considerable effort put in to create the draft papers, some of the preferred direction conclusions do not sit well with the Breckland Strategic Vision or earlier commentary on the Issues/Options papers. Moreover, the logic in determining some aspects of the Location Strategy and associated criteria for determining and designating Local Service Centres leaves something to be desired.

The Strategic Vision suggests new development should be directed to locations with transport provision, support services and community facilities, and that additional rural housing should facilitate planned growth and infrastructure in a sustained and cohesive manner. Some of the paper's conclusions seem to have lost sight of this.

While the Location Strategy seems sound in principle, this balancing out of some development to rural communities should go hand in glove with other commentary on the Issues/Options paper seeking solutions to the current problems of life in small rural communities (aging population, limited employment and public transport, poor infrastructure etc); otherwise development will only exacerbate these problems. . The paper rightly emphasises the wider cooperation with higher authority over housing needs etc, but that same cooperation, vital for sustainable development, doesn't seem to exist in areas outside of Breckland's control, such as education, health care and transport. Moreover, arguments that housing development result in necessary infrastructure improvements are not borne out by experience

On LSC criteria, and despite the opinions expressed in response to the Issues/Options paper, this Parish Council believes it is a fallacy to totally ignore population size in determining LSC status – as evidenced by many later conclusions such as development targets, which are presumably related to size. More importantly, the logic of effectively ignoring adequate access to medical facilities (one of the key elements of the Strategic Vision, and indeed a major consideration in the essential criteria for traveller sites) seems very illogical.

From the above, it is clear that, while Bawdeswell Parish Council supports PD 01 and PD 02 in principle (commensurate with the need for better cooperation with, and responsiveness from higher authorities to solve the problems of living in small rural communities), the current PD 03 is not supported because of the simplistic criteria used in determining LSC status. This effectively fails to address adequately the key issues of support facilities and infrastructure necessary for cohesive and sustainable development in smaller rural communities.

The criteria used in the paper to establish Bawdeswell as a potential LSC includes significant errors. While the village does have a primary school within the popular Reepham catchment area, it is creaking at the seams at present in terms of student population, as evidenced by the recent NCC agreement to replace 2 extra temporary classrooms. Moreover, while the village does have a community facility and a limited local convenience store, the local butcher closed down a year ago, and the post office facilities recognised in the paper amount only to a satellite facility (when communications allow) on 2 mornings a week in the church vestry. Local employment facilities are very limited, and most local businesses are not manpower intensive and many are individual enterprises run from home. Without assistance, there is little scope at present for increased employment. There is some public transport between Norwich and Fakenham, but this is a much reduced service, in both time and frequency (no evening service). Perhaps this is why the NCC seeks to limit consideration of public transport to peak times only in concluding possible LSC status! Bawdeswell also has no public transport to access local medical facilities in North Elmham, Swanton Morley or Reepham, or to the local market town (Dereham). It is for these reasons, the Parish Council strongly believes that Bawdeswell should not be designated a LSC.

Outside of the concerns raised about the nature of the location strategy and criteria for LSC status, it is difficult not to support the principles within PD04. However, it would be interesting to know how the individual target figures for housing development in the LSC settlements were made – population size, extent of service support? Moreover, the paper needs to make clear how robust these targets are. For example, having met the individual target, would any designated LSC status open the door to wider opportunistic development well above the target set?

Bawdeswell Parish Council is broadly in favour with the preferred direction PD05, whether or not the village remains a proposed LSC. However, support for PD05 begs the question about the future and nature of settlement boundaries.

Bawdeswell already has a clearly defined settlement boundary which has been used to good effect in past consideration of local planning applications. Whatever its future status, Bawdeswell would wish to retain this boundary to protect both the nature and size of the village, prevent undesirable ribboning and to retain the landscape buffer between the A1067 and the settlement. That said, the Parish Council would not be averse to minor adjustments in any subsequent boundary

review, as advocated in the paper, but it would oppose any changes aimed at accommodating major tracts of potential development land. As previously stated, however, the Parish Council would look sympathetically at applications for affordable housing adjacent to the settlement boundary on an exceptional basis, as per the current Breckland strategy. In sum, Bawdeswell wants a strong settlement boundary with little room for major development, but it is not averse to some limited flexibility in exceptional planning applications which seeks to promote the needs of the village.

One final comment on PD 09; the idea of putting traveller sites adjacent to newly defined LSCs with relatively small resident populations cannot be supported. They would have too much of an impact on rural communities of less than 1,000 people – perhaps another reason why population size cannot be totally ignored when determining LSC status!

Turning briefly to the Part 2- Emerging Site Options paper, the title itself (“emerging”) raises questions over the efficacy of commenting at this stage on what is very much a first stab at finding sufficient ‘deliverable’ land to meet the 5-year housing need. Moreover, it is not clear from the paper what the word “deliverable” actually means? The danger, however, given that the document is now in the public domain, is numerous premature planning applications for ‘deliverable sites, with sympathetic treatment by planning staffs and premature expectations of planning approval.

Of the 2 site options currently considered for Bawdeswell, the rationale making them “deliverable” is weak. While one (LP 002) might be a possible option, most of it lies outside the current settlement boundary and access to and from the area is via an adopted but largely overgrown road, so access is a problem despite the Highways advice. The other site (LP 003) is owned by two different landowners, and is prone to flooding and sewerage problems. It also abuts a recently developed NCC-sponsored wildlife conservation area, which is of high environmental value.

Given the nature of the problems existing within Bawdeswell at the moment, it is important that consideration of any future potential sites take particular account of the road safety/access and drainage difficulties in certain areas of the village, along with the limited support facilities on offer.