

Policy S/SH Settlement Hierarchy (P48)

The Plan states that 'Cottenham should be classified as a Minor Rural Centre reflecting a revision to the criteria for a segregated public transport route such as the Greater Cambridge Partnership schemes of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, which is not the case of Cottenham.'

We strongly disagree that Cottenham should be relegated in the settlement hierarchy.

Policy S/SH fails to define each categorisation of settlement simply stating the limits that will be placed on development within each tier.

In the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Rural Centres are defined as those that are the largest, most sustainable villages of the district. They have good access to a secondary school (either within the village or accessible by good public transport), employment opportunities, a variety of services and facilities and have good public transport services to Cambridge or a market town.

Meanwhile minor Rural Centres are defined as those that have a lower level of services, facilities and employment than Rural Centres, but a greater level than most other villages in South Cambridgeshire, and often perform a role in terms of providing services and facilities for a small rural hinterland.

We maintain on this basis that Cottenham should remain a Rural Centre. The shortcomings in the approach proposed in the Greater Cambridge Plan is summarised below:

Cottenham continues to benefit from good public access and a range of shops and services. It remains a sustainable location for future development. By all other measures Cottenham remains comparable to the other Rural Centres, if anything the recent developments in the village have consolidated this. It is considered that this site remains suitable for in excess of 30 houses. To summarise:

Cottenham continues to offer good access to a secondary school, employment opportunities, a variety of services and facilities and have good public transport services to Cambridge.

In terms of population, amenities and services Cottenham remains largely comparable to the other Rural Centres. Equally it is evident that Cottenham has a greater range of facilities relative to the minor rural centres and is better able to accommodate growth;

The Greater Cambridge Plan (First proposals) does not define what is deemed to constitute a Town, Rural Centre or Minor Rural Centre. Notwithstanding, if you look at population, amenities and services however Cottenham remains largely comparable to

Histon & Impington, Great Shelford & Stapleford and Sawston. Equally it is evident that Cottenham has a greater range of facilities relative to the minor rural centres;

It is stated within the Greater Cambridge First proposals that the reason for changes to the settlement hierarchy, is due to a revision to the criteria for a Rural Centre, in that they must have high quality public transport in the form of a segregated public transport route, such as the Greater Cambridge Partnership schemes, or the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway. There is no justification for this fixation on certain forms or mediums of public transport. There is no doubting that Cottenham is accessible to the Greater Cambridge Area. There appears no sound logic for demoting the centre on this basis.

Cottenham benefits from a bus service to Cambridge every half hour. This service takes approximately 31 minutes whereas services from Great Shelford and Stapleford take approximately 20-32 minutes, current services from Cambourne take approximately 30-50 minutes and services from Sawston take approximately 45 minutes. There is no clear basis on which Cottenham is therefore now deemed less accessible than the other Rural Centres therefore;

The Neighbourhood Plan (May 2021) identifies a desire locally / need to consolidate and enhance existing services and amenities, with policy that acknowledges the potential for sites in excess of 50 houses to come forward. Key issues highlighted in the plan include limitations on education, medical, leisure and recreational facilities. Aspirations in the plan point to the retention of Cottenham as a Rural Centre. Demotion of Cottenham's status runs contrary to the policy aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The viability of Cottenham remains dependent on a critical mass of residents. It is in this context that the new residential development has been permitted in recent years. The neighbourhood plan identifies 500 units are to be added to Cottenham following permission granted in 2017-2018. This will increase the population further in Cottenham. It is counter intuitive to down grade Cottenham in the settlement hierarchy having just allowed this growth which in effect consolidates its status as a rural centre.

Further to the above, demotion of Cottenham's status at the expense of the nearby centres of Waterbeach and Northstowe presents real challenge to the future viability of Cottenham, in terms of services and amenities, given their potential appeal. The Neighbourhood Plan raises concern about the potential of rival centres to draw residents from Cottenham. Again, the promotion of local centres at the expense of Cottenham, which is instead being actively downgraded, flies in the face of the neighbourhood plan aspirations.

In determining applications for previous housing development in Cottenham, South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Planning Inspectorate have concluded that Cottenham is a sustainable, suitable location for large scale housing development.

Cottenham was promoted from a Minor Rural Centre to a Rural Centre in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 on the basis of its accessibility generally and its range of facilities and services. Since this time further residential development has taken place in the village. In this context it is unclear why Cottenham is considered to have become less sustainable.

A blanket limit of 30 units on any development site in a centre such as Cottenham, that is able to offer a sustainable range of services and facilities, runs contrary to the NPPF. Cottenham has in recent years been viewed as a sustainable location for additional housing. It is clear on this basis that any policy should allow for the review of the respective merits of any future residential proposals rather than simply prohibiting development on the basis of a generic, uninformed benchmark. Similarly it is clear that this policy runs contrary to Policy COH/2-2 of the Cottenham Neighbourhood Plan.

Recommendation: Cottenham's role in the Spatial Strategy be reconsidered. Cottenham be identified as a Rural Centre allowing for the consideration of any future residential proposals on their respective merits having regard to the accepted sustainability of the village.