

Heathfield and Thriplow Neighbourhood Plan 2022 to 2041

A summary, prepared for Parish Councillors, of the consultation draft plan

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a number of measures allowing communities to shape the future of their area and to deliver the sustainable development that they need. One of these measures is the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). A NP can set policies for the use of land and rules for new development. Once a NP is made, it will become part of the statutory development plan and will be used in determining planning applications.

The plan area for the Heathfield and Thriplow NP was designated by South Cambridgeshire District Council on 25 August 2017 following an application made by the Parish Council.

Since then, the Heathfield and Thriplow Neighbourhood Plan (H&TNP) steering group, comprising a group of residents and Parish Councillors has been tasked with bringing forward a plan which reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people living in the parish and which will meet the 'basic conditions'. Following a process of early community and stakeholder engagement, together with the collection of a comprehensive evidence base, the H&TNP steering group have prepared the Regulation 14 draft of the Heathfield and Thriplow Neighbourhood Plan.

What are the basic conditions?

The 'basic conditions' for neighbourhood plans are that the planning policies must:

- be appropriate, having regard to the national policy and guidance contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the area (in our case this is the 2018 Local Plan adopted by South Cambridgeshire District Council)
- be compatible with and not breach European Union (EU) obligations (the existing body of environmental regulations is currently retained in UK law).

In addition, neighbourhood plans must meet human rights requirements.

What is the Regulation 14 version of the Neighbourhood Plan?

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, as amended provides the statutory provisions for bringing forward neighbourhood plans. Regulation 14 stipulates that before submitting a plan to the local planning authority, the qualifying body (in our case this is the Parish Council) must run a statutory consultation with people who live, work and carry on business in the plan area, for a minimum period of 6 weeks.

The details of the provisions can be found here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/regulation/14>

The Parish Council must meet the requirements set out in Regulation 14 when undertaking this consultation.

What does the draft Neighbourhood Plan do?

The NP proposes to cover the plan period 2022 to 2041.

The NP contains a vision, four themes, twelve objective and fifteen planning policies. The planning polices are complemented by 9 community initiatives which sit outside the planning process and are primarily for the Parish Council to progress.

The NP vision is:

Thriplow and Heathfield will grow sustainably whilst remaining a ‘living’ community providing a high quality of life and social cohesion for residents of all ages across the whole parish, respecting its rural roots and enhancing the natural environment. Access, via non-motorised (active-travel) routes, to our surrounding countryside and neighbouring settlements will be improved, bringing with it social, mental health and physical health benefits.

The themes and objectives and the way in which they are linked to the 15 planning policies and 7 community initiatives are illustrated in the table at the end of this report.

Policy THP 15 - The Grainstore Site

An important element of the NP is Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore Site. This policy sits under Theme 1 *Protecting and enhancing the natural environment and the character of the parish* as well as Theme 2 *Living village and sustainable development*. The policy allocates land at Lodge Road for the delivery of approximately 20 additional homes including affordable housing, which will be prioritised for households eligible for affordable housing and who have a connection to the parish. The site was assessed as the most sustainable options out of 5 sites identified as being potentially available for development. The site assessment work is available to view at <https://www.thriplowheathfieldnp.org/jan-2021-draft-site-assessments.html>

The NP has been informed by the Heathfield and Thriplow Parish Character Assessment, completed in 2020 by landscape architect Lucy Batchelor-Wylam. The landscape architect also carried out a landscape and visual sensitivity assessment of the sites assessed in the process of identifying the most sustainable sites for development. In addition, the landscape architect has prepared a landscape brief for the Grainstore site, which itself was informed by feedback provided at a parish-wide community engagement exercise undertaken in November and December 2021.

The policy requirements set out in Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site is directly informed by the landscape brief and feedback provided by the community as part of the 2021 community engagement work.

Theme 1: Protecting and enhancing the natural environment and the character of the parish

Improving the built environment and landscape character in Heathfield is the first of twelve objectives in the NP. To inform the NP, a Masterplan document covering the built-up area of Heathfield was prepared by AECOM in 2022. This work was commissioned by Locality, on the behalf of the Parish Council. This work has been used to inform the development of the

Heathfield Enhancement Strategy which is included in the NP. This identifies 11 issues that need addressing, together with potential solutions to address these issues.

Importantly, whilst it is estimated that 60% of the parish's population lives in Heathfield, the settlement is not identified as a suitable location for additional growth. This is because access to amenities, shops and services is lacking at Heathfield, and also because the settlement is surrounded by the Green Belt. This restriction on development in Heathfield will limit the degree to which improvements could come forward as a direct result of development proposals in Heathfield.

The policies do nevertheless have an important role to play. In the past, it is considered that development proposals that have come forward in Heathfield, which have failed to deliver good quality developments with good quality landscaping. Some schemes have made existing problems worse. The policies in the NP will mean that existing problems and issues can no longer be used as an excuse for delivering poorly designed and poorly landscaped schemes.

Objective 2 seeks that "the existing built environment and landscape character of Thriplow village will be protected and enhanced". As with the 2018 Local Plan, the NP identifies Thriplow village as the most suitable location for additional development. In addition to the 2018 Local Plan (which the NP finds has done a good job in ensuring that the built environment and landscape character in Thriplow is protected or enhanced), the NP includes Policies THP 2 *Protecting and Enhancing Village Character in Thriplow* and THP 4 *Important Countryside Frontages*, both focused on ensuring all development respects the existing special characteristics in Thriplow village.

In addition to the policies mentioned above, Theme 1 includes policies focused on protecting and other special features in the parish. This includes locally valued views (identified in a map) across the parish and a Local Green Spaces policy for Heathfield (Thriplow already has designated Local Green Spaces through the 2018 Local Plan).

The desire to protect and enhance biodiversity in the parish features strongly in Theme 1 too. There are three policies focused specifically on doing this.

Theme 2: Living village and sustainable development

Under this theme, the plan is focused on ensuring the parish continues as a living community, which sustains the primary school shops and facilities (Objective 6). As part of this, the NP recognises the value in delivering additional residential development where the new dwellings will help address existing affordable housing needs in the parish and subject to proposals coming forward in the most sustainable location. Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site is an important part of this. In addition, Policy THP 11 *Rural exception sites in Thriplow* supports, in principle, the delivery of rural exception sites on sites outside the Thriplow development framework where such schemes would address parish specific affordable housing needs. The policy includes criteria including that any such homes must be affordable in perpetuity.

Also under Theme 2 is Policy THP 12 *Improving parking provision and improving road safety in Thriplow and Heathfield* and Policy THP 13 *Protecting and improving the rural footpath network and sustainable connections to neighbouring settlements*. The former responds

specifically to identified road safety and parking issues in both Thriplow and Heathfield and the latter is focused on protecting existing routes and identifying opportunities to secure new footpath routes and securing new and better active travel routes so that parish residents can be more sustainably connected with surrounding villages.

Theme 3: Social Cohesion and Parish Integration

It is envisaged that objective 12 “There will be more cohesion between the two communities of Heathfield and Thriplow” is partly addressed through the preparation of this neighbourhood plan. There has been considerable joint working between residents in the two settlements in the preparation of the plan to date. In addition, Policy THP 14 *Development proposals resulting in better integration between the Heathfield and Thriplow communities* is an aspirational policy which supports in principle development proposals which deliver improvements to the sustainable travel route between the two communities, a new outdoor recreational space to serve both communities as well as a community meeting space which meets the needs of both settlements.

An overview of the 3 theme, 12 objectives, 15 planning policies and 7 community initiatives

Theme 1: Protecting and enhancing the natural environment and the character of the parish

Objective 1: The character and quality of the built environment and landscape character in Heathfield will be protected and improved.

- Policy THP 1 – Improving the character and quality of Heathfield
- Policy THP 2 – Provision of additional amenities in Heathfield
- Policy THP 5 – Parish-wide Locally Valued Views

Community Initiatives 1, 2 and 3

Objective 2: The existing built environment and landscape character of Thriplow village will be protected and enhanced.

- Policy THP 3 – Protecting and enhancing village character in Thriplow
- Policy THP 4 – Important Countryside Frontages in Thriplow
- Policy THP 5 – Parish-wide Locally Valued Views

Objective 3: New development will be sensitive to our rural environment and reflect our rural routes

- Policy THP 5 – Parish-wide Locally Valued Views
- Policy TH6 – The Rural Economy

Objective 4: recognise and protect accordingly all valued open spaces in the parish

- Policy THP 7 – Heathfield Local Green Space

Objective 5: Seek to reverse the decline of the natural environment in the parish by protecting and increasing biodiversity in the parish

- Policy THP 8 - Protecting sites and features of biodiversity value in the parish
- Policy THP 9 – Increasing parish biodiversity and delivering biodiversity net gain through development proposals
- Policy THP 10 – Protecting and enhancing the parish tributary feeding the Hoffer Brook
- Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site

Community Initiative 4

Theme 2: Living village and sustainable development

Objective 6: We will continue to be a living community, which sustains the primary school, shop and facilities

- Policy THP 11 – Rural exception sites in Thriplow
- Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site

Objective 7: There will be limited small scale additional housing development focused in Thriplow near to existing shops and services

- Policy THP 11 – Rural exception sites in Thriplow
- Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site

Objective 8: All development to use sustainable building materials and consider energy efficiency

- Policy THP 15 – The Grainstore site

Objective 9. Plan for improved outdoor recreational facilities in the parish

- Policy THP 14 - Development proposals resulting in better integration between the

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- Policy THP 14 - Development proposals resulting in better integration between the Heathfield and Thriplow communities

Community Initiative 5

Objective 10: A safe, less congested village

- Policy THP 12 – Improving parking provision and improving road safety in Thriplow and Heathfield

Community Initiatives 8 and 9

Objective 11: The quality and quantity of our rural footpath network and interconnectivity with neighbouring settlements will be improved

- Policy THP 13 – Protecting and improving the rural footpath network and sustainable connections to neighbouring settlements

Community Initiative 6

Theme 3: Social Cohesion and Parish Integration

Objective 12: There will be more cohesion between the two communities of Heathfield and Thriplow