1. **The South Northamptonshire Settlements and Development Management Policies Local Plan**

1.1 The South Northamptonshire Settlements and Development Management Policies Local Plan will help to shape the South Northamptonshire District for the period up to 2026. It will sit alongside the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy which sets out the strategic policies for the District, for example setting out overall housing and employment numbers and strategic site allocations for urban extensions at Towcester and Brackley as well as on the edge of Northampton and at Silverstone Circuit. The Local Plan will set out the opportunities for development and clear policies on what will or will not be permitted. It will replace the current Local Plan which was adopted in 1997.

1.2 The Local Plan will include a number of detailed policies to guide the decision making process for future planning applications across South Northamptonshire (excluding those parts within the Northampton Related Development Area). It will cover all the areas that are not the subject of strategic policies, for example the rural settlements, the open countryside and the remainder of Towcester and Brackley where there are not urban extensions.

2. **Policy Context**

2.1 In reviewing the confines the Council must have regard to national and other 'higher level' planning policy. For South Northamptonshire, this means the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) and the Joint Core Strategy.

2.2 At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. When preparing local plans and considering changes to confines, local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change.

2.3 The Joint Core Strategy sets out an urban focussed strategy for new development and includes large housing and employment allocations at Brackley and Towcester. However there are other issues relating to Brackley and Towcester that need to be examined including smaller non-strategic housing and employment allocations These may require changes to the town boundaries.

2.4 The Joint Core Strategy requires that villages will be expected to provide for local needs and to support local services. The Joint Core Strategy Policy R1 gives this Council the opportunity to determine its own rural settlement hierarchy and to decide the scale of development that will be accommodated by individual settlements. The hierarchy will determine which villages see the most development and growth, and should consider existing service provision and any opportunities to improve service provision to enhance the sustainability of the settlement. The outcome of this work will in turn determine where a particular village will sit under Policy R1 of the Joint Core Strategy and this will have a bearing on where changes to confines may need to be made. The Council is also consulting on a suggested methodology that considers settlement hierarchy.
2.6 The JCS seeks to sustain and enhance the rural economy by creating or safeguarding jobs and businesses. It also points out that accessibility to jobs and services is a key issue facing the rural areas. Transport is essential for most rural residents to access the services and facilities they need.

2.7 An important factor in determining the strategy for development in the rural areas, including the drafting of the confines, will be the amount of new development required across the whole District and the overall development strategy. This is set out in the Joint Core Strategy. The Council has already allowed for some growth within 16 of its more sustainable villages under the Interim Rural Housing Policy. However, it is important to note that these sites are only located in a limited number of villages in South Northamptonshire. It is important that the remaining villages in the District do not become fossilised and that, in accordance with the Framework all communities will be expected to meet objectively assessed local housing needs for both market and affordable housing.

2.8 Based on the above policy framework the main principles underlying this review of confines are:

- The Council needs to plan for its strategic development requirement as set out in the Joint Core Strategy.
- Sustainability should be the main consideration in choosing locations for development.
- An urban focused approach towards identifying sites for development will be followed starting with locations within and adjoining the urban areas of Brackley and/or Towcester.
- Development opportunities are more likely to be acceptable where they are needed to help sustain and support existing facilities within a particular village.
- If any planned development (other than that required to meet natural and local needs growth) is required it should be situated within the most sustainable villages within the District which it can be demonstrated are capable of supporting additional housing growth.

3. The key Issues

3.1 An important part of the new Local Plan is the consideration of town and village confines. The purpose of defining confines was to establish the limits of development in Brackley, Towcester and the majority of the District’s villages. The existing confines have been in place since 1997 and the Council now needs to make decisions on the following important issues:

- The establishment of an agreed policy approach towards the scale and location of new development (ie. to continue with the current policy of town and village confines or not).
- If it is considered appropriate to continue with the confines policy approach, then to determine where changes to existing boundaries need to be made.

3.2 The Plan will consider all of its villages including those that do not currently have village confines. In each case the Plan will determine whether to retain or introduce confines and where the confines should be drawn.

SNC SDMLP Topic Paper: Methodology for Village Confines
4. **Stage 1: Should the Council continue with the confines policy?**

4.1 South Northamptonshire has relied on the planning policy tool of drawing up village confines or envelopes to limit development beyond the settlements into the countryside. The advantage of this method of drawing settlement boundaries is that these provide certainty over where development is likely to be acceptable. However, this can lead to a general presumption that development within boundaries is acceptable, and can result in pressure for development on open space within settlement boundaries where development may not be appropriate. It would also be important to ensure that if retained confines were not defined so tightly as not to allow for sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change as this would conflict with The Framework. The advantage therefore of a criteria based policy is that each proposal would be considered individually and on its own merits.

4.2 A criteria-based policy could provide an alternative approach to the definition of village confines. All applications would be covered on their merits, and criteria would cover key issues such as sustainability, layout, design, form, etc. Such a policy would support new development where it enhances the sustainability of settlements and does not harm the open character of the countryside, provided that development meets a number of criteria. These criteria are likely to require new development to:

- be adjacent to the existing footprint of the settlement; maintain the compact nature of the settlement;
- respect the historic core;
- respect the settlement character and form; provide access to services and facilities;
- respect natural boundaries such as trees, hedges, rivers and streams;
- not result in the loss of important open spaces within the settlement;
- not result in the coalescence of settlements;
- and prevent the sprawl of new development into open countryside.

4.3 Such a policy would provide a mechanism by which proposals may be assessed against their impact on identified features and characteristics of the settlement, but which also provides flexibility to allow for changes in the surroundings to be taken into account.

4.4 A policy with confines:

- provides clearer rigid policy framework for elected members and Development Control Committee and leads to consistent decision making;
- provides certainty for parish councils, local people and landowners;
- will be likely to result in fewer appeals;
- allows for a clearer policy stance for exception affordable housing schemes;
- makes it easier for the Council and other organisations to plan future infrastructure and service delivery;
- prevents intrusion into the countryside through incremental growth;
- ensures that new development is sympathetic in scale and location to the form and character of settlements;
- prevents the coalescence of neighbouring settlements.
But:

- could result in village cramming and intensification of land use within confines (back garden development);
- could result in pressure on undeveloped land, or changes of use of land within confines that may be locally important;
- as development within confines continues, the amount of land with development potential reduces;
- time consuming and resource intensive to prepare confines and to revise in the future (at a time where it is critically important for the Council to have an adopted Plan in place as quickly as possible);
- limits the scope for new employment/retail/community development because land with development potential is more valuable for residential;
- is prescriptive, as it does not allow for the consideration of changes in circumstances in settlements, for example the closing of a local shop or the provision of more public transport or local housing needs;
- could result in artificially high land values for sites suitable for development within confines;
- could result in artificially high land values for land within confines and higher house prices.

4.5 Depending on the outcome of this question, if it is decided to continue with a confines policy then the following issues need to be considered.

### Stage 1

**Issue for Consideration**

**Should the Local Plan define settlement confines and what are your reasons for this?**

5. **Stage 2: Which villages should have confines?**

5.1 If confines are to be retained then the second issue to be considered is to determine those settlements that should have confines and those which would more appropriately be considered as open countryside for planning policy considerations. This assessment is based on the special character of a particular settlement and the size, location and level of existing services and facilities of each village in order to determine if new development would meet the sustainable objectives set out in strategic planning policy above.

5.2 It may be that there are a number of villages that because of their particular special character and form or the lack of any local facilities and services and limited public transport would not be sustainable locations for new housing or employment development. It may therefore not be appropriate to define confines for these villages for these reasons. Any development needs for these settlements would then be located in nearby larger settlements.
5.3 Villages without confine boundaries would be subject to the same strict planning controls that govern development in the open countryside. These controls would not normally preclude residential extensions, or other development that is acceptable in the countryside.

Stage 2
Issue for Consideration

Which villages do you consider should or should not have confine boundaries and what are your reasons for this?

6. Stage 3: Drafting Confines

6.1 Having considered those villages requiring confine boundaries, the next stage is a factual survey that takes account of how to best draft the confine boundaries in order to overcome known anomalies and based on easily identifiable features on the ground and in addition to consider whether any provision should be made for ‘natural growth’ or ‘breathing space’ within the plan period. This is based on seeking a balance between a desire to avoid village cramming whilst allowing some scope for appropriately scaled development given that the confines are likely to be in place for a number of years.

6.2 The definition of confines as set out in the current 1997 Local Plan states:

‘that area of the village defined by the existing main built up area but excluding those peripheral buildings such as free-standing individual or groups of dwellings, nearby farm buildings or other structures which are not closely related thereto. Gardens, or former gardens, within the curtilage of dwelling houses, will not necessarily be assumed to fall within the existing confines of the village.’

6.3 There are a number of key considerations that need to be taken into account when reviewing this definition and considering new village confines.
Key consideration 1

The need to try to base confines on strong physical boundaries that can be easily identified on the ground. (Roads, watercourses, and strong field and curtilage boundaries)

Across the District there are examples of where confine boundaries have been drawn, for example through back gardens or across the middle of open land. The survey of confine boundaries has involved identification of property boundaries from Ordnance Survey maps, aerial photographs and site visits. This has resulted in some boundaries being redrawn along stronger easily identifiable boundaries on the ground that are more easily understood.

However, there are some large gardens on the edges of villages that extend into the open countryside or the character of which relates more to the surrounding countryside than to the main built up part of a village. Where this is the case the suggested confines boundary has been drawn so as to exclude this. The ‘cutting’ of these gardens is regarded as a positive development control tool to limit the potential for further residential development particularly in smaller villages with limited social and other infrastructure. In these circumstances the policy will not be operated to establish a presumption against the granting of planning permission for ancillary domestic buildings in those parts of residential curtilages that lie outside the confines. Where permission is required for these developments then each application will be considered on its own merit.

Stage 3

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to either include or exclude garden and curtilage land in the confines? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
Key consideration 2

The need to try to control future ribbon development within villages

There is a particular issue with garden curtilages at the side of dwellings where these are the last dwelling on a road. To allow infill development in these locations would add to the ribbon development of a village. This is particularly the case where development on one side of a road is not mirrored on the opposite side. In these cases the boundary could be drawn so as to exclude the garden area.

Stage 3
Key consideration 2

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to try to prevent future ribbon development? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
Key consideration 3

Exclude undeveloped land that is, in use or appearance, more closely related to adjoining open countryside than to the built up part of a village or that affords important views into or outward from a village or an attractive setting for listed or important buildings or conservation areas.

The character and distinctiveness of many, particularly smaller, villages in the District is enhanced in those locations where the countryside extends between buildings into the built up area. This affords views of the countryside and can in turn provide important settings for important buildings and conservation areas. In order to preserve these qualities and help protect such land from development pressure such land may be excluded from the confines.

Stage 3
Key consideration 3

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to try to exclude undeveloped land for the reasons set out above? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
Key consideration 4

Include developments that have taken place outside but adjoining confines (including exception sites) and outstanding planning permissions where development has started

Since the existing confines have been in place there have been some developments that have taken place outside but adjoining confine boundaries. These are usually exception affordable housing sites but may also be developments where planning permission has been granted. In addition to these there is a need to consider whether outstanding planning permissions on sites that are not started are appropriate under current planning policy guidance. An assessment should be made as to whether an application for a renewal of planning permission would be considered acceptable in policy terms. This will normally be older approvals (ie: pre 2000) that have yet to be started.

Stage 3

Key consideration 4

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to try to include developments that have taken place outside but adjoining confines? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
Key consideration 5

Exclude developments that are isolated or peripheral to the main built up part of a village.

It is suggested that confines boundaries should not be defined around individual or small clusters of houses or areas of scattered development where such buildings are detached from the main concentration of buildings within a nearby village. Although it is recognised that such dwellings may be considered locally as ‘part’ of the nearest village in community terms, it is important in planning policy terms to limit the amount of new development to take place in rural areas with few services and little or no public transport.

Stage 3

Key consideration 5

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to exclude developments that are isolated or peripheral to the main built up part of a village? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
**Key consideration 6**

**Farm Buildings**

In respect of agricultural buildings an assessment has been made of how these relate to the built form of the village and the type and structure of the buildings. Complexes that are well related to the built up part of a village may be included whereas complexes that extend out into the open countryside are more likely to be excluded.

Modern non-traditional farm buildings that have been built resulting in an incremental extension to the built form of a farm complex are likely to be excluded from the confines. However long established traditional buildings closely related to the main built up part of a village are included.

![Diagram showing existing and suggested new confine boundaries](image)

### Stage 3

**Key consideration 6**

Do you agree with the proposed changes to the confines to try to include traditional and other farm buildings that are well related to the built up part of a village and exclude modern non-traditional and other buildings that extend into the open countryside? Are there any changes that you consider are appropriate?
Key consideration 7

Local Green Space and Green Belt Designation

The Framework enables local plans to identify and protect green areas of particular significance to individual settlements. This local significance could be because of the green area’s beauty, historic importance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife. By designating land as Local Green Space, local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. There are some limitations to its use:

- It presupposes that there are already sufficient sites allocated and investment planned in homes, jobs and other essential services within the community
- Designation should be capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period ie sufficient flexibility is available in land allocations to allow for further development in the future
- The space in question should be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves, it should be local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

The Framework also enables the establishment of Green Belt around or adjoining any new development once development required to meet local needs has been catered for.

The important issue for many rural communities is that, provided they adopt positive planning attitudes to meeting future needs for housing and employment, there are now two options for ensuring the community is not as vulnerable to further unplanned development: the new Local Green Space Designation and formally establishing a Green Belt.

Stage 3

Key consideration 7

Are there any areas of Green Space or Green Belt that should be included in the Local Plan?
7 Stage 4: Site Specific Allocations

7.1 The final stage will be to determine if provision is to be made for any significant new development in the rural areas and then to identify those villages where this development would be most appropriately located. Following this, there will be a need to identify specific sites that will then be included within the newly defined confines as suitable for that development. Critical to this stage will be the development strategy and the level of new growth considered appropriate for the rural areas. However, until the development strategy is agreed through the Local Plan process and work on settlement hierarchy, it would be inappropriate to select particular villages or to consider the appropriateness of specific sites for development. The Council has been made aware of a number of sites in villages across the District where the landowner is willing to release land for development. It has also launched a ‘Call for Sites’ that may result in further sites being promoted. These will be considered over the next few months in conjunction with the development strategy and a judgement will be made to whether they should or should not be considered for inclusion within the confines either to form a stronger more defensible boundary, to meet development requirements or in the case of larger sites any new planned allocations.

7.3 Any site proposed for development must be genuinely available and likely to be developed during the period of the Local plan. To be considered developable a site should be in a suitable location for housing development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available for and could be developed at the point in time envisaged. To be deliverable a site must be:
- available (the site is available now)
- suitable (the site does not have significant and insurmountable planning constraints (eg: flood risk, contamination, access) and offers a suitable location for development now and would contribute to the creation of mixed and balanced communities) and
- achievable (there is a reasonable prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years.

7.4 A number of other physical or environmental factors may restrict the availability of a site. The list below is not exhaustive but the most common issues may revolve around:
- Contamination
- Ransom strip
- Access into the site (eg through residential roads or private drives)
- Site topography/gradient

7.5 Important issues in relation to the developability of a site relate to ownership and the likely level of developer interest. Where an owner has expressed a willingness to release or sell the site within the time period of the Plan, it will be assumed that there are no constraints. Constraints may occur where the owner is unknown, not contactable, unwilling to release the land or where the site is owned by a number of different (and possibly competing) interests. Information relating to the ownership of
a site will be obtained from those people who have submitted details of the site and where appropriate Officer knowledge.

7.6 Knowledge of developer interest will be obtained from the house building industry. A site will only be deemed to be constrained by developer interest if this has been brought to our attention by the industry.

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Are you aware of any available, suitable and deliverable sites that should be considered for inclusion within revised confines to meet local development needs?