



# WITCHFORD Neighbourhood Plan

**AS MADE (ADOPTED) ON 21 MAY 2020**

## **Witchford Neighbourhood Plan**

### **Foreword**

Witchford Neighbourhood Plan – what is it, and why have we spent three years developing it?

It is a land-use plan that fits into the East Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan, but it is focussed on the priorities of our community.

Witchford has changed massively over the last fifty years, from a community that needed Rackham School to accommodate sixty pupils to one that must now educate three hundred plus. The village doubled its population in the 1990s as new housing built to the north and south of Main Street was occupied. Witchford is facing massive unexpected and unplanned change following the failure of the District Council to allocate enough land to meet government housing targets. A Neighbourhood Plan can influence the type and location of new housing and will ensure that more of the money raised from development will be available to the parish rather than being spent across the district.

The changes to the village have had positive as well as negative impacts. The new population has brought a diversity of employment and much greater educational opportunities. New development need not be feared if it meets local needs. The reasonable fear of change, which we cannot prevent, can be tempered by obtaining the benefits from new development for our community, for example more affordable housing or potentially assistance with village hall improvements.

The Plan seeks to robustly defend undeveloped green spaces that are particularly special to the community, while agreeing to the development of others that would have less negative impact. All the priorities of the Plan have been selected following analysis of the consultation questionnaires and feedback from issues raised at stalls run by volunteers at village events. We have tried to get responses from all sections of the community, young and old, those working here and elsewhere and also local employers. We have benefitted from professional assistance in landscape appraisal and in structuring and writing the document.

We have received many comments on issues that cannot be addressed through this land-use based process. These include health provision, educational facilities, retail expansion and some transport issues. All the responses will provide an evidence base for further work by the Parish Council.

The Neighbourhood Plan will provide reassurance that all planning applications will have to take into account the policies and priorities of the Plan. In addition to the East Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan will have independent legal status as a planning document.

The Plan aims to give greater certainty over development and seeks to anticipate change that is likely in the period to 2031. I hope it meets with your approval and support.

Ian Allen Chairman Neighbourhood Plan Committee

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Witchford Neighbourhood Plan was commissioned by the Parish Council in 2016, who then created a Steering Group

The Steering Group comprised: Councillor Ian Allen (Chairman), Cllr Rose Lacey, Mrs Jo Forrest, Mrs Jane Heath, Mr Kenneth Lee and Mrs Shelagh Monteith, with professional planning support from Modicum Planning.

Funding was provided by the Parish Council and Locality Grant funding.

Invaluable guidance on drafting the Plan was provided by Rachel Hogger working with Cambridgeshire ACRE, who also provided advice and data on demography, housing, economic activity, deprivation etc.

Advice and feedback were provided by the Strategic Planning Officer at East Cambridgeshire District Council

The Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Landscape appraisal was undertaken by Alison Farmer of Alison Farmer Associates

On behalf of the Parish Council and personally, I thank all who have contributed to bringing the plan to fruition not least the whole community of Witchford for participation in the creation of this important document

Ian Allen

Chair

Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Committee

Fig. 1 - Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Process



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Appendix 2 Complementary Projects List

In Chapter 3 'The Key Issues Facing Witchford', quotes shown in blocks are comments *in their own words* taken directly from the Witchford residents' Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire February 2018.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document is the Made Witchford Neighbourhood Plan.

### About Neighbourhood Plans

- 1.2 The Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 gave local communities new powers to directly influence how the places they live in will develop in the future by producing Neighbourhood Development Plans. This is reinforced by the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 which states “*Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies.*” (para.29). Witchford’s Neighbourhood Plan has been produced under these powers.
- 1.3 When adopted, the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan will have the same status as the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, becoming part of the ‘development plan’. Decisions on planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material conditions indicate otherwise. As such this Neighbourhood Plan will provide an important framework for how Witchford will develop in the coming years.
- 1.4 The Local Planning Authority covering the Neighbourhood Area is East Cambridgeshire District Council. The Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for its area and must have regard to national policy and advice. The Local Plan currently in force is the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan adopted 21st April 2015

### About the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan

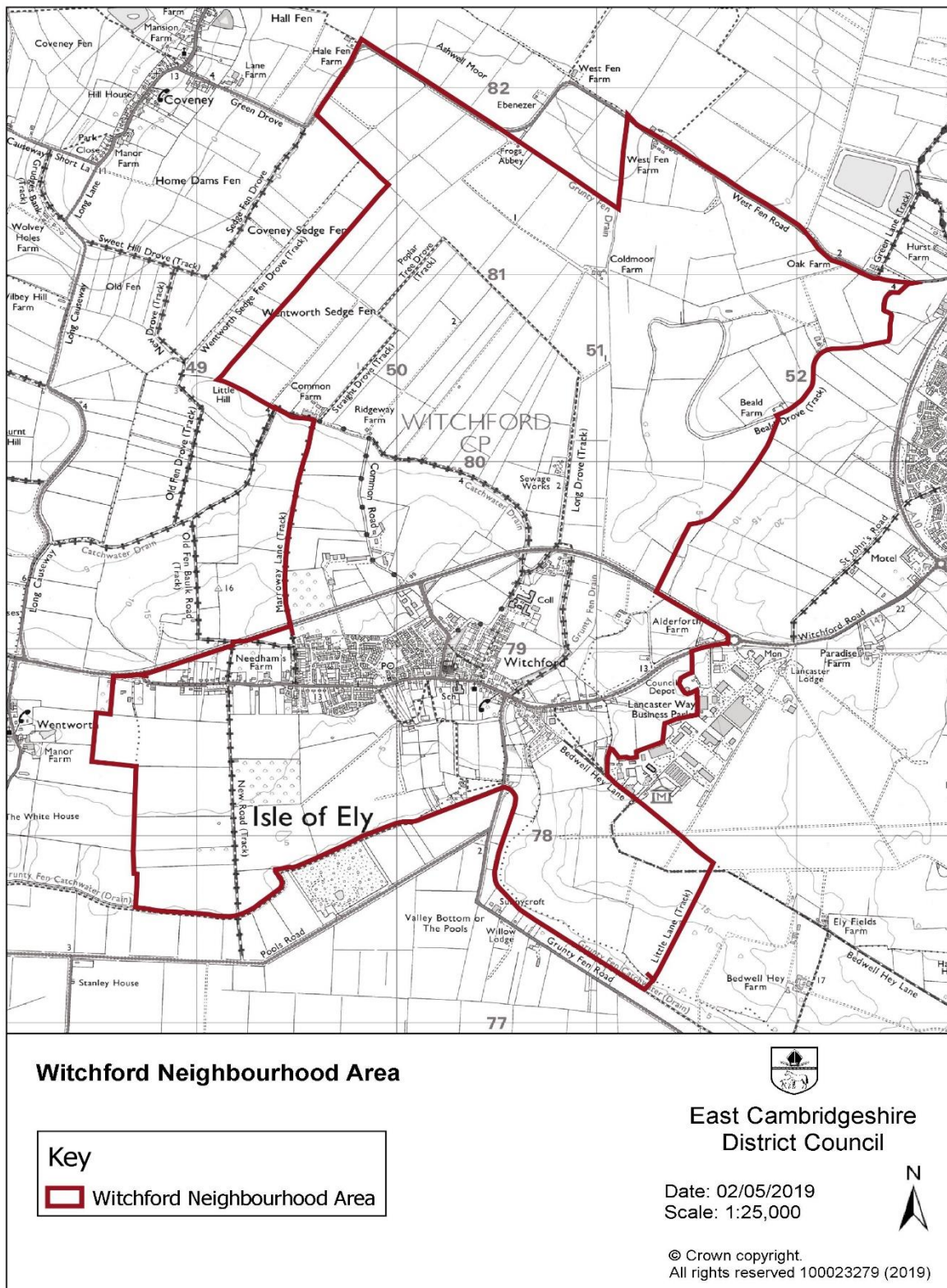
- 1.5 This Neighbourhood Development Plan (called the ‘Witchford Neighbourhood Plan’ in the rest of this document) is submitted by Witchford Parish Council on behalf of the community of Witchford. This document covers the period 2019 – 2031, mirroring the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan which covers the period 2011-2031.
- 1.6 The purpose of the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan is to allow the community to form a vision for the future of Witchford, and to produce a range of planning policies that will ensure future development is sustainable and in sympathy with that vision.

The Vision Statement that underpins this Neighbourhood Plan is:

**‘To value and protect the rural character and community spirit of Witchford, ensuring that future development meets local needs’**

Through this Neighbourhood Plan, Witchford will be able to ensure that its vision of a distinct, thriving community sits firmly within the local planning framework.

- 1.7 The Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Area covers the whole of the administrative parish of Witchford. Neighbourhood Area designation was confirmed by East Cambridgeshire District Council on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016. The Witchford parish boundary was altered by means of the East Cambridgeshire District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018 and the Neighbourhood Plan Area was amended accordingly on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019.



Map 1: Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Area



## 2. About the Witchford Neighbourhood Area

### 2.1 About Witchford

Witchford is a parish within the Local Authority area of East Cambridgeshire District Council. The heart of the village lies about three miles south west of Ely city centre. The village itself lies to the south of the A142. However, the parish boundary takes in a much larger, mainly rural, hinterland which extends both southwards and northwards from the village. The village is situated in the Isle of Ely, one of the larger islands of higher ground which prior to the drainage of the Fens in the seventeenth century remained dry and habitable when the low-lying fens were flooded. Archaeology indicates that the area was settled from Roman times, and the village is mentioned in Domesday Book. Economic activity was mainly agricultural; by the early-twentieth century Witchford had also developed as a major horse-trading centre. In 1942 Witchford RAF Station was built on land east of the village, remaining operational until the end of the Second World War. Its location now forms the core of Lancaster Way Business Park. Witchford developed as a linear settlement along the main road west of Ely; this is the Main Street of the village where all the older housing is situated. The A142 bypass to the north of the village was constructed in 1989 and housing development followed, with two large estates built to the north of Main Street in the 1990s.

### 2.2 Settlement form and character

The Witchford Landscape Appraisal (WLA) identifies three distinct built forms:

- The historic core, a concentration of historic buildings (including St Andrew's Church, the telephone kiosk and five houses along Main Street) built in traditional yellow brick and local vernacular styles reflecting rural cottages and farmhouses. Buildings often sit at the edge of the pavement along Main Street, and are predominately one plot deep, creating a clearly defined streetscape;
- An area of linear development along Sutton Road comprising a dispersed pattern of historic farm buildings/rural cottages separated by more recent infill dwellings and notable areas of open space/agricultural land. Dwellings are often set back from the road with front garden plots and the character of Sutton Road is rural with grass verges, hedges and trees; and
- An area of infill estate development which has established in the second half of the 20th century to the north of Main Street. In these areas houses have a visual uniformity and are arranged in cul-de-sac road layouts.

The Witchford Landscape Appraisal describes Witchford as *"a typical fenland settlement in that it is primarily located on the south facing slopes of a low hill surrounded by open fenland farmland and has historically comprised a linear arrangement of dwellings and farms along the road which connected Ely to March. At right angles to this route are 'drove roads' and lanes which connected the settlement to the wider fen/common. The village is unusual for two reasons, firstly in its proximity to Ely and secondly its historic focus on a shallow valley which separates the wider Isle of Ely from the lower, smaller island on which the village sits. The subtle changes in topography and arrangement/hierarchy of linear routes has shaped the form and feel of the village and also affects the gateways. The A142 has had a relatively small influence on settlement gateways and continues to be perceived as separate from the village."*

### 2.3 Landscape

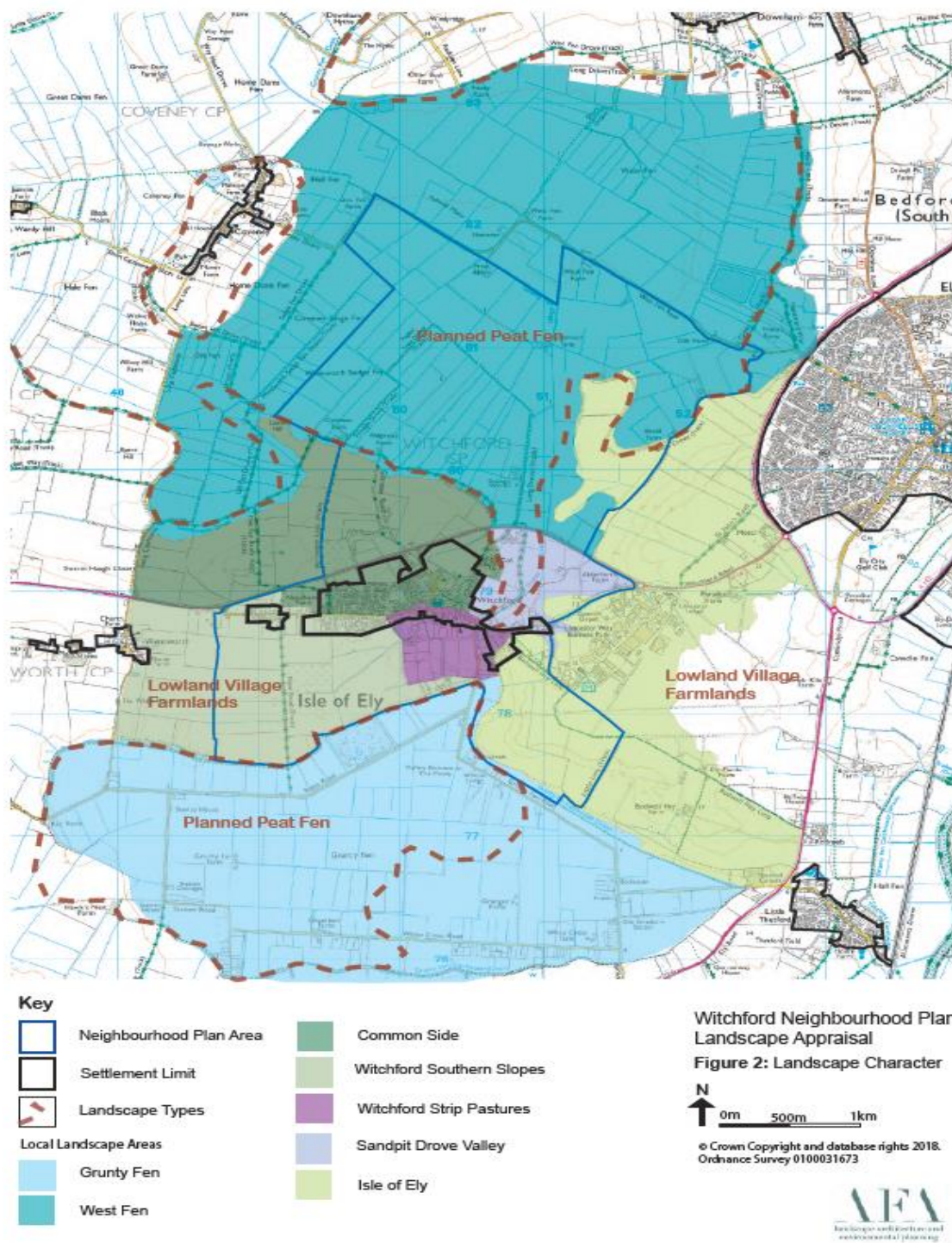
National Character Area Profiles, produced by Natural England, are broad divisions of landscape forming the basic units of cohesive countryside character. Witchford falls within National Character Area 46 The Fens, described as *"a distinctive, historic and human influenced wetland landscape which formerly constituted the largest wetland area in England. The area is notable for its large-scale, flat, open landscape with extensive vistas*

*to level horizons. The level, open topography shapes the impression of huge skies which convey a strong sense of place, tranquility and inspiration."*

The East of England Landscape Typology defines two landscape character types in the Witchford plan area: Lowland Village Farmland and Planned Peat Fen (shown on Map 2).

The Witchford Landscape Appraisal supplements the Landscape Typology and draws out local variations in character. The assessment defines a further seven local character areas which are geographically specific and unique. The settlement character and landscape context are described for each character area. The assessment illustrates the variety of character in the plan area and helps with understanding sense of place in Witchford and the wider parish. The character areas help to describe the variety of character found within the Neighbourhood Plan area and local sense of place. These areas are:

- Grunty Fen
- West Fen
- Common Side
- Witchford Southern Slopes
- Witchford Historic Core and Strip Pastures
- Sandpit Drove Valley
- Island of Ely



Map 2: Extract from the Witchford Landscape Appraisal

## 2.4 The residents of Witchford

Witchford's population stood at 2,360 in 2015. Witchford experienced significant growth during the 1990s but has been much more stable recently. The population grew from 1,440 in 1991 to 2,270 in 2001, and has grown much more slowly since. Witchford is a popular village for families. There are high levels of family households and school age children. In contrast, there is a very low proportion of people in their 20s.

Economic activity rates are high in Witchford. This is heavily influenced by high levels of part-time working among women. There are relatively few people employed in professional roles. Witchford employed residents are more likely to be employed in 'intermediate' occupations such as administration and sales. This is related to qualification levels. Relatively few people in Witchford are qualified to Higher Education level (see Demographic and Socio-Economic report (DSER), 2017).

Witchford experiences relatively little deprivation. The main issues are access to services and housing affordability. The DSER finds that the number of working age benefit claimants in Witchford fell by a third during the five-year period 2012-2017. Most benefit claims are related to unemployment. However, caring responsibilities and disability are also factors.

## 2.5 Employment and services

The largest employment sectors in Witchford are education and 'administrative & support service activities'. A significant amount of employment in manufacturing, retail, construction, transport and storage is provided by the Lancaster Way Business Park (an Enterprise Zone comprising 175 acres). Although not in Witchford parish, the business park impacts directly upon Witchford from the point of view of employment, landscape and traffic generation. The smaller Sedgeway Business Park and Greenham Park, north and south of the A142 respectively, provide a similar range of jobs, as well as some flexible office space.

Most employed residents in Witchford commute relatively short distances. About half either work from home or commute within East Cambridgeshire. About a quarter commute to Cambridge City or South Cambridgeshire, with a smaller number commuting to London via Ely railway station.

Witchford benefits from pre-school, primary school and secondary school facilities. The Rackham CofE Primary School 2018-19 PAN (Published Admission Number) is 315, Witchford Village College's 2018-19 PAN is 900 (but the number of pupils on roll in January 2019 is 800) and there is current capacity for early years provision (provided by Witchford Rackham Pre-School and Lancaster Lodge Childcare) for 98 places.

As at July 2019, there are no capacity issues for early years provision, primary school provision and secondary school provision. With regard to primary-aged children there were 246 children aged 4-10 living in the catchment and this total is expected to fall to 180 by 2025/26. With regard to secondary school-aged children in January 2018, there were 875 children aged 11 – 15 living in the catchment area and this is anticipated to increase to 979 by 2022/23.

However, the County Council has articulated as part of responses to planning applications that increases in the catchment population, together with increases triggered by approved development, mean that there is a certain need to increase secondary school places at Witchford Village College at some point during the plan period and the County Council has costed a project for this to take place.

The County Council also anticipates a potential shortfall in primary school places and early years if development is built out on sites put forward through planning applications, but not included as part of the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. This can be seen for example from viewing the County Council response to a planning application for land at



27-39 Sutton Road (19/00966/OUM) prepared in July 2019. Here, they anticipate that the development pipeline could increase the primary-aged population by a further 168 pupils (168 plus 180 (as at 2025/26) takes the overall demand to 348 which exceeds the current capacity of 315 at Rackham primary school). In their calculations, the County Council has taken into account development coming forward on permitted sites as well as development on three sites (not anticipated as part of this Neighbourhood Plan) pending appeal and consent.

The County Council's position in July 2019 can be established by reviewing their response to a recent planning application for land at 27-39 Sutton Road (19/00966/OUM). This can be found at [www.eastcambs.gov.uk](http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk) and is also provided in the evidence base supporting this plan.

There is a much-valued post office and general store, but this is open only during the day so shopping at the evening and weekends (particularly for commuting families) depends on supermarkets in Ely. There is a Chinese take-away in the village, one pub, a hairdressing salon and veterinary surgery. A mobile library visits Witchford fortnightly. The nearest petrol station is on the A10 Ely bypass, although there are two car repair garages in the village. There are no GP, dentist or nurse practitioner facilities in Witchford.



Fig 2. Witchford take-away and Post Office. Photo taken February 2019

Three play areas cater for children up to the age of 14, but there are no facilities for teenagers. Access to leisure facilities in Ely (including the Ely Leisure Park and The Hive Leisure Centre) is car-dependant because of the lack of a safe pedestrian/cycle crossing at the A10/A142 junction.



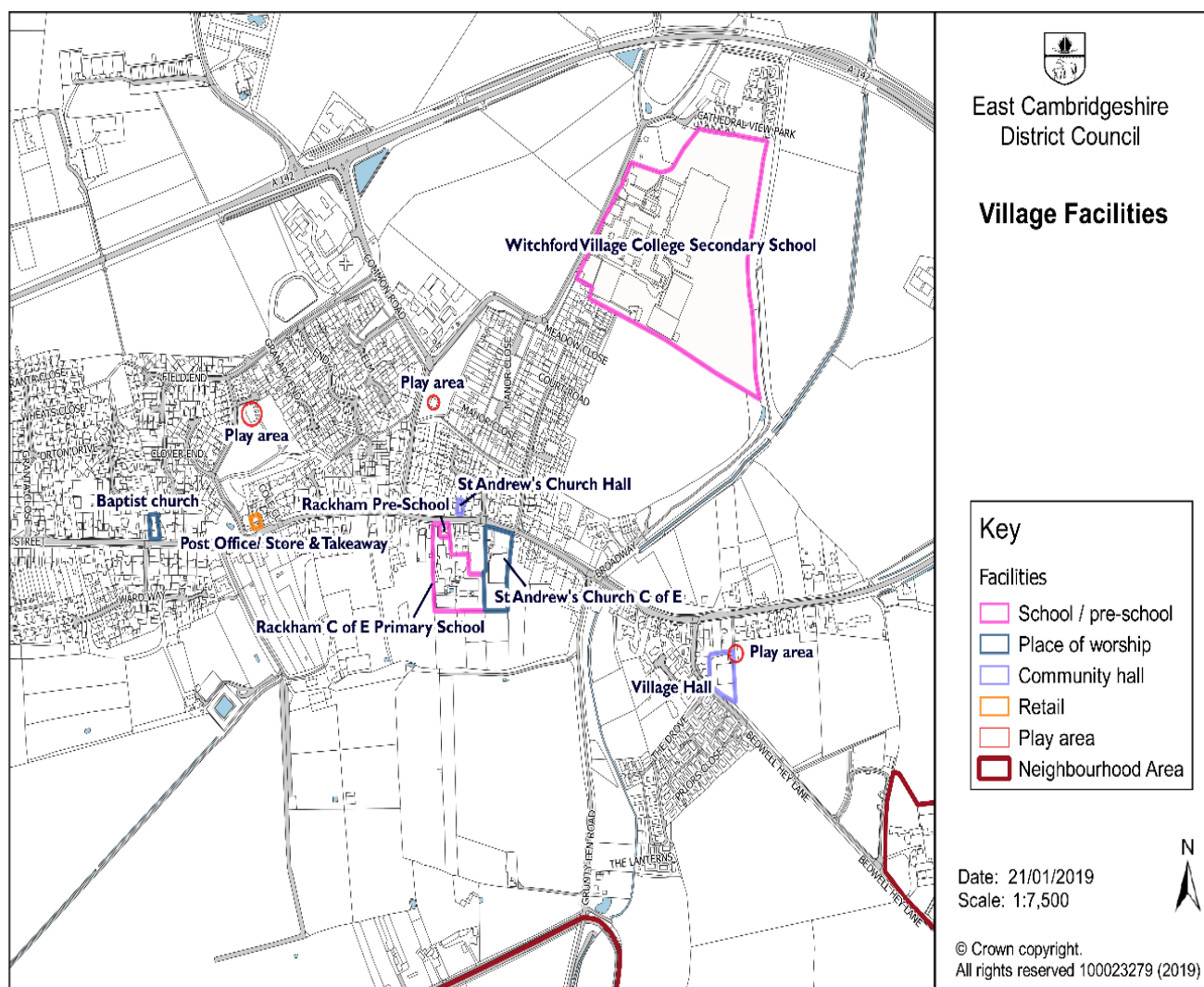
Fig 3. Common Road play area. Photo taken February 2019

## 2.6 **Community**

Witchford has a range of community facilities. Sport is mainly centred on football with a number of teams using the playing field attached to the village hall. Astro-turf pitches are available to hire at Witchford Village College, and gym facilities at the College are open to the public. Evening classes are also held at the College. A riding stables offers a range of equestrian services and the network of droves north of the village provide good off-road horse-riding and cycling opportunities.

The village hall, built in 1990, is in need of refurbishment and modernisation. The hall is run by the Witchford Playing Field Association, which is developing plans and a funding strategy for the required improvements.

Community groups include drama, choral singing, two sets of allotments, conservation volunteers, WI, Rainbows, Brownies and Scouts. Witchford is served by a Parish Church and a Baptist Church.



Map 3: Community Facilities, Employment Centres and Services

## 2.7 Housing

As noted in the Demographic and Socio-Economic report supporting this plan (2017), the number of dwellings grew from 590 in 1991 to 920 in 2001 before slowing down to 960 in 2011. In 2015 the dwelling stock stood at 970. However, planning permissions granted during 2016-19 suggest that Witchford is about to enter into another period of significant growth, which could see the village grow by about 40 per cent.

Witchford's housing stock is dominated by owner occupation. There is relatively little rented property whether affordable or market. The majority of housing is detached or semi-detached. There are two mobile home parks. In general, house prices are well above the average for East Cambridgeshire. There is a particularly high premium for larger properties which is consistent with a high demand from families. However, house prices and rental costs for all property sizes in Witchford are challenging for low income families. The number of households with a Witchford connection on the district's housing register was 38 as at September 2019.



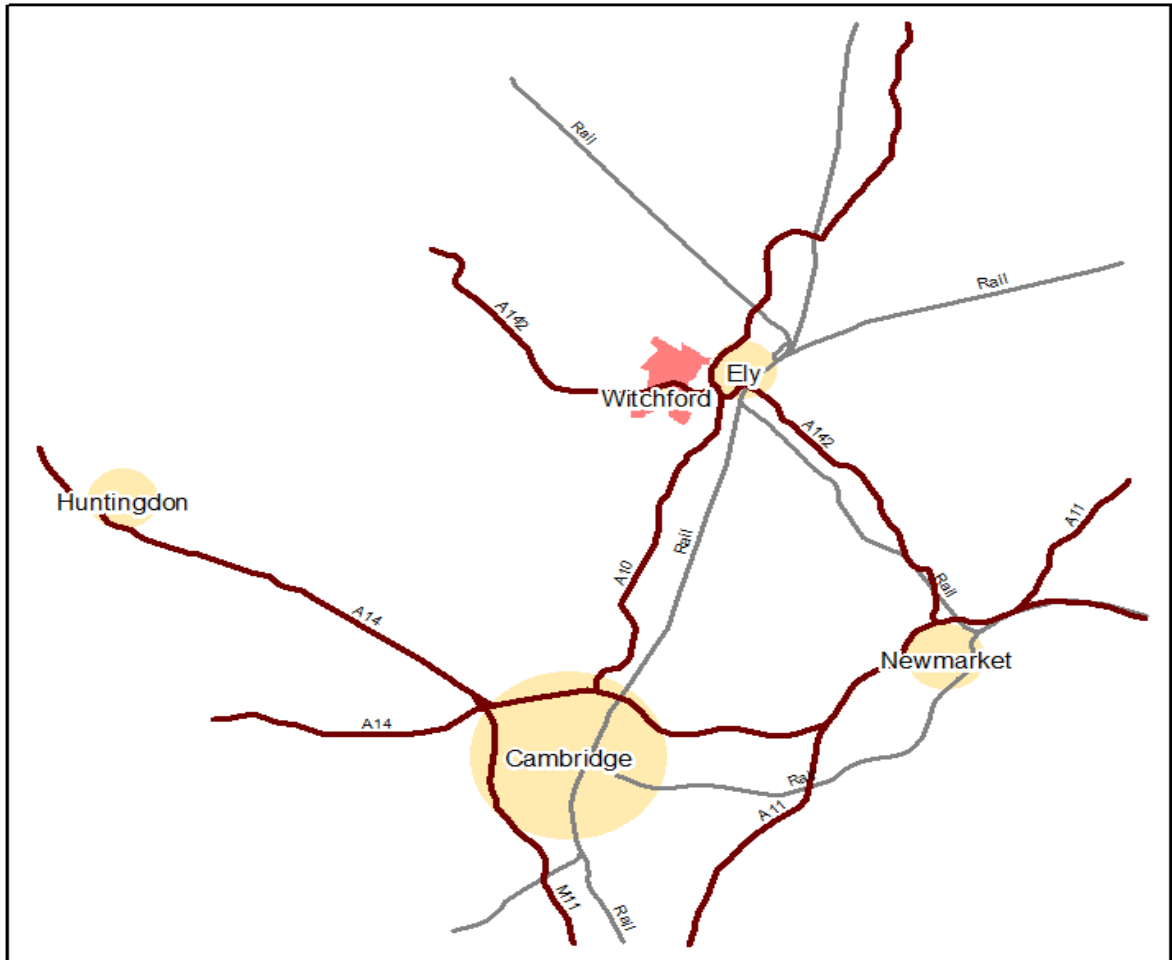
## 2.8 Transport

Witchford village is situated approximately 1 mile west of the A10 Ely bypass and immediately south of the A142 Witchford bypass. The village is therefore sandwiched between the two main arterial routes in East Cambridgeshire District: the A142 carrying traffic between the main Fenland towns of Wisbech, March and Chatteris to Ely and on to Newmarket and the A14 Trunk Road, and the A10 carrying traffic from Kings Lynn south to Cambridge and on to London. A minor road leading south from the village (Grunty Fen Road) links directly to the A10. At peak times, congestion on the A142 and issues of traffic speed and volume from commuting traffic, school traffic and 'rat-running' cause intense pressure on the main road through Witchford. Other problems are parking and traffic speed/volume from in-village car journeys (exacerbated by the elongated layout of the village).

A bus service runs every two hours between Witchford and Ely. The railway station at Ely (3 miles away) has very regular services but there is no direct public transport service from Witchford to the station.

A pedestrian/cyclepath runs alongside the A142 between Sutton (5 miles west of Witchford) to the A142/A10 junction. However, access to the services in Ely is hampered by the lack of a safe pedestrian/cycle crossing over the A10 at that junction.






**Indicative diagram to show location of  
Witchford Neighbourhood Area**



**East Cambridgeshire  
District Council**

**Key**

 Witchford Neighbourhood Area

Date: 15/01/2019  
Scale: 1:300,000



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Map 4: Transport Links

### 3. The Key Issues facing Witchford

*Keeping the village moving with the modern world and expanding doesn't mean it has to lose its charm.*

3.1 The key issues facing Witchford have been identified from the documentary evidence base and the responses to consultations with the Witchford community (see Consultation Statement and Appendix 1). It is these key issues which form the basis of the policies in this Neighbourhood Plan.

3.2 Some of the priorities which are important for residents are not achievable through land-based planning policies, or are not directly within the remit of the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan. Witchford Parish Council aims to address these wider priorities as free-standing projects, separate to but informed by the Neighbourhood Plan. These are outlined in Appendix 2 to the Plan.

#### 3.3 Landscape and character

Retaining the character of Witchford as a discrete rural community – separate from Ely – is a key issue arising from all the consultation undertaken with residents. This can be addressed by ensuring an undeveloped area of land is retained between Witchford and Ely and between Witchford and the Lancaster Way Business Park. The distinctiveness of Witchford can be protected by paying particular attention to views to and from Witchford over the surrounding countryside, and by defining a characteristic village edge.

*I love Witchford. It's a lovely village and a village it should remain!*

#### 3.4 Green infrastructure

Listing, designating and protecting existing green infrastructure has emerged as a key issue for residents, along with enhancing opportunities for enjoying the Witchford countryside (including wild play).

*One of the most wonderful things about living in Witchford is the fantastic green areas/ walks and open spaces.*

#### Housing

3.5 Key issues that have been identified relating to housing are the need for smaller housing units to enable young people to stay in Witchford (a notable feature of the demographic make-up of Witchford is the low proportion of people in their 20s), for affordable housing units for single-person households and families, and for bungalows or adaptable housing units to allow older residents to downsize from family homes to free these up.

*We need to build affordable accommodation that allows our children to afford to live here and be part of the community where they grew up.*

### 3.6 Infrastructure

Key issues that have been identified relating to infrastructure are the need for the provision of facilities to keep pace with housing supply, facilities for teenagers, expanded shopping facilities, the provision of health services in Witchford and the refurbishment of the village hall.

*'Development is inevitable but should be proportionate and go hand in hand with infrastructure improvements and increased facilities'.*

### 3.7 Traffic

Key issues that have been identified relating to traffic in Witchford village are the need to address the volume and speed of traffic on Main Street (both from in-village traffic and 'rat-running'), the difficulty of leaving the village at the Common Road/A142 junction, congestion at the Lancaster Way Business Park roundabout leaving Witchford village, parking and congestion issues on Main Street (including those related to the primary school) and on Manor Road near the Village College.

*'Road safety has to be a priority'*

### 3.8 Witchford and Ely connectivity

Being able to access the services at Ely and Cambridge/London (via Ely railway station) is a key issue for residents. This includes access for both road users and pedestrians and cyclists. Road improvements and the enhancement of links for pedestrians and cyclists (which could have the additional effect of reducing pressure on the roads) are needed. Measures include improvements to the A142 and A10, a pedestrian/cycle crossing over the A10 into Ely from Witchford and a more regular bus service to Ely.

*'Any additional developments within the village must be preceded by better road provision. The current traffic system from Witchford to Ely cannot cope with current, let alone future, demands'*

### 3.9 Supporting Witchford's micro-economy

The Demographic and Socio-Economic report which supports this plan finds that most employed residents in Witchford commute relatively short distances. About half either work from home or commute within East Cambridgeshire. A further 10 per cent have 'no fixed workplace'. This could include, for example, construction workers who will work on different sites. About a quarter commute to Cambridge City or South Cambridgeshire. Fewer than 30 employed residents commute to London and there are similar numbers commuting to Fenland and Huntingdonshire. The parish itself also includes a number of employers including businesses at Sedgeway Business Park, Greenham Park, Witchford Village College and Witchford Primary School.

On the face of it therefore, Witchford would appear to be sustainable in terms of local economic opportunities.

However, due to the significant road congestion issues on the A142 (alongside the difficulty of crossing the A10/A142 for those without a vehicle) the need to travel any distance outside of the parish presents challenges to residents. Simply providing more

job opportunities on existing employment sites within or around the parish will not necessarily address these challenges since local job opportunities will not necessarily attract or be suitable for Witchford based residents.

Instead this plan recognises the level of current parish-based employment activity maintained by parish residents (e.g. home workers and local businesses). Parish based employment activity helps to limit the amount of daily out and in commuting. It is also important for the purpose of maintaining a lively village atmosphere through different times of the day.

A key priority here is therefore to implement and encourage measures which will contribute to Witchford's micro-economy.

*'I would support more industry and business around Witchford'*

#### 4. Witchford Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

- 4.1 The overall vision for the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan was developed during the initial consultations with residents, and was tested in February 2018 in a village-wide survey (with a 40% response rate), when 97.94% of respondents agreed that this wording should be adopted as the Vision Statement for the Plan:

**'To value and protect the rural character and community spirit of Witchford, ensuring that future development meets local needs'**

- 4.2 Seven objectives have been formulated through consultation and engagement with the community, addressing the key issues facing Witchford during the life of the Neighbourhood Plan. Individual policies have then been developed within the framework of these objectives.
- 4.3 The seven objectives set out below are in no order of priority:
- i. Landscape and character: To maintain the rural fenland character of Witchford. To protect the open space between Witchford and Ely, so that the village remains a distinct and separate community.
  - ii. Green infrastructure: To identify, protect and enhance the green infrastructure, open spaces and valued views of Witchford and the opportunities to enjoy the Witchford countryside.
  - iii. Housing: To maintain a thriving community through the provision of housing to meet the range of needs of current and future residents of Witchford.
  - iv. Infrastructure: To encourage and promote the provision of sufficient infrastructure, amenities and services to allow Witchford to retain its character as a self-sustaining, thriving community.
  - v. Traffic in Witchford: To address issues relating to the speed and volume of traffic through the village, and to create attractive and usable opportunities for pedestrian and cycle access within Witchford with the aim of reducing in-village car use.
  - vi. Witchford to Ely connectivity: To support proposals to improve infrastructure for safe and easy travel by cycle, on foot and by public transport to Ely and to Ely train station.
  - vii. Supporting Witchford's micro-economy: To support existing local businesses and to encourage increased economic activity appropriate to the rural nature of the parish.

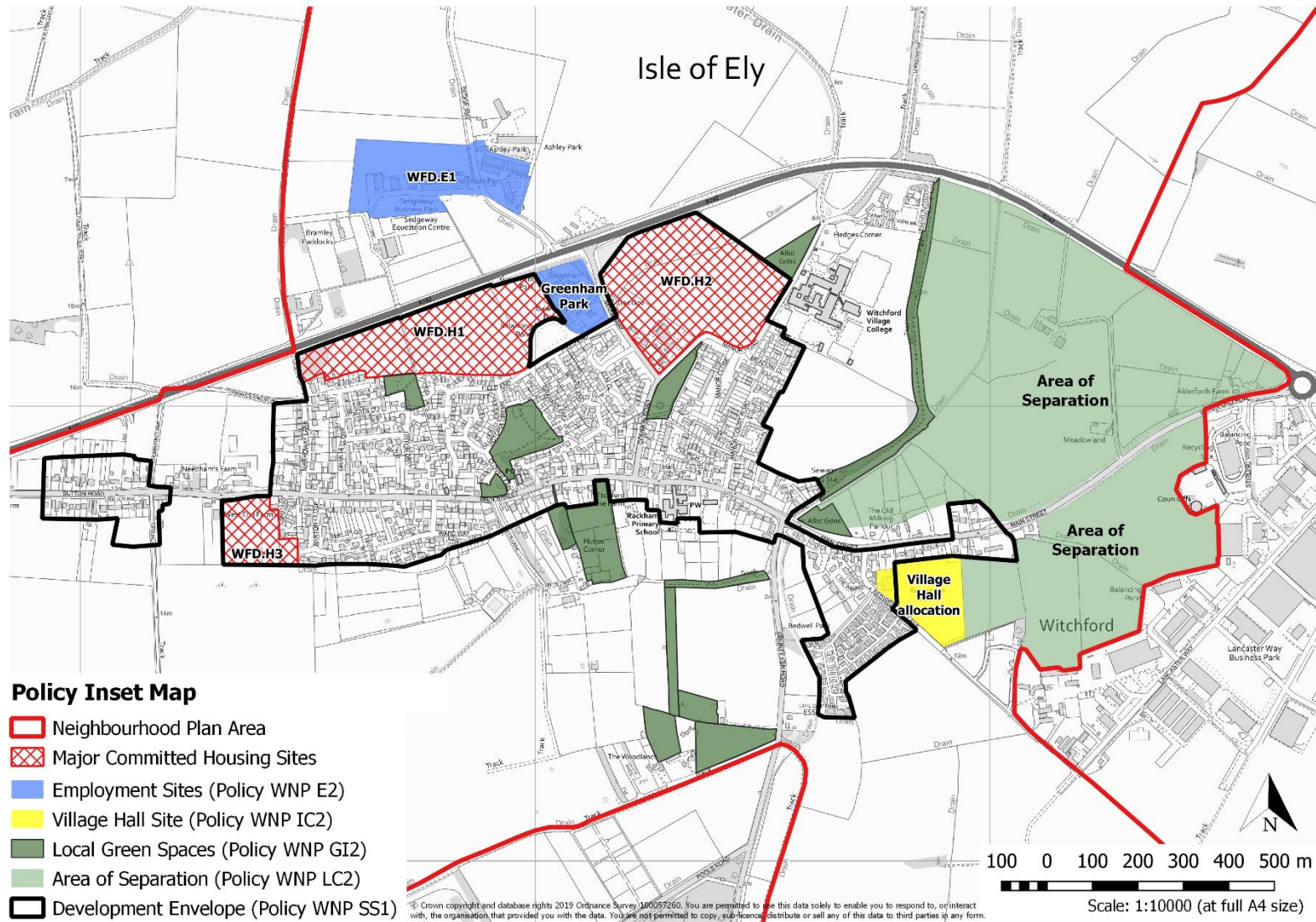


- 4.4 This framework of vision, objectives and policies was underpinned by the results of two village-wide questionnaires and a range of other consultation opportunities. Full details of the community consultations can be found in the separate Consultation Statement.
- 4.5 A wide range of documentary evidence on all the policy areas was used in drafting this Neighbourhood Plan. A full list of all the documentary evidence is included in Appendix 1. Copies of all the documentary evidence or relevant weblinks are all available via the Parish Council website [www.witchfordpc.org/neighbourhood](http://www.witchfordpc.org/neighbourhood)

## **5. Policies**

This part of the Neighbourhood Plan addresses the following policy areas:

- Location of new development: A spatial strategy for Witchford
- Landscape and character
- Green infrastructure
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Village traffic
- Witchford to Ely connectivity
- Supporting Witchford's micro-economy



Map 5: Inset Map of Policy Allocations

## 5.1 **Location of new development: A spatial strategy for Witchford**

### **Policy WNP SS1 A spatial strategy for Witchford**

The permitted housing sites WFD H1, WFD H2 and WFD H3 will deliver approximately 330 homes during the plan period 2019 – 2031. In addition, other proposals within Witchford's development envelope, which is defined on Policy Map 6 will be supported provided they accord with other provisions in the Development Plan.

Outside the development envelope, development will be restricted to:

- rural exception housing on the edge of the village where such schemes accord with Policy WNP H2 of this plan;
- appropriate employment development at the Sedgeway Business Park where such schemes accord with Policy WNP – E2 of this plan; and
- development for agriculture, horticulture, outdoor recreation, essential educational infrastructure and other uses that need to be located in the countryside.

#### 5.1.1 **Intent**

To provide a strategic overview and clarity of the future direction of development in the Plan area. For avoidance of doubt, the development envelope shown on Policy Map 6 supersedes the development envelope provided in the 2015 Local Plan.

#### 5.1.2 **Context and reasoned justification**

This is an overarching policy for the Neighbourhood Plan that provides the context for all the other planning policies.

The development envelope is based on that set out in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 for Witchford but amended to include within it the recent major housing commitments particularly those to the north of Witchford extending out to the A142. It is shown on Policy Map 6. Development proposals coming forward outside the development envelope will be regarded as countryside locations, whereas the principle of development within the development envelope is generally accepted.

In the last plan period, parcels of land outside the Local Plan development envelope were given permission for housing development. These were permitted on appeal (after East Cambridgeshire District Council had recommended refusal) on the basis that the district could not demonstrate a sufficient supply of housing (referred to as a sufficient 5-year land supply<sup>1</sup>). Development, including these 5-year land supply sites, has resulted in schemes coming forward without due regard to the context, character and sensitivities of Witchford's setting and wider landscape character. Notwithstanding this, it is important that the Neighbourhood Plan spatial strategy for the parish is one which takes into account existing commitments (planning permissions) and uses this as a starting position from which to plan ahead.

<sup>1</sup> A 5 year land supply is a supply of specific deliverable sites that can provide 5 years' worth of housing against a housing requirement agreed as part of a Local Plan or against a local housing need

## Witchford Housing Requirement

The adopted Local Plan for East Cambridgeshire District Council does not allocate any housing sites in the parish. It does define a development envelope tightly around the built-up part of the village and supports in principle infill development within these boundaries. The Local Plan allows in principle for rural exceptions housing to come forward on the edge of the development envelope and anticipates that approximately 37 new dwellings (c. 2 per year) will be built on infill sites in the village during the period 2013 to 2031.

Since June 2015, the policies specific to housing delivery in the Local Plan have been found to be out of date (when the planning inspectorate approved an appeal for development of up to 128 homes outside Witchford's village envelope on a site referred to as Land off Field Road. The inspector found that the district did not have a 5-year land supply<sup>2</sup> and because of this, the balance was tipped in favour of that particular development).

To inform the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan, East Cambridgeshire District Council have provided the parish with an updated housing requirement figure to be met during the period 2018 to 2031. This figure is 252 dwellings, or 19.4 dwellings per annum in the period 01 April 2018 to 31 March 2031. This figure has been provided in line with paragraph 66 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states the housing requirement figure for a neighbourhood plan should take into account the latest evidence of local housing need, the population of the neighbourhood plan area and the most recently available planning strategy of the local planning authority.

The purpose of providing a new housing requirement figure for the Neighbourhood Plan (an updated figure to the one provided in the adopted Local Plan) is to make sure that once the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan is made (adopted), it can be considered to be up to date in the decision-making process.

The District Council calculated the indicative housing requirement for Witchford in a manner which is consistent with national policy, taking into account a range of relevant factors.

The most recently available planning strategy for the district, the Local Plan 2015, formed the starting point for calculating the indicative figure - both in terms of the overall housing requirement and its locational strategy for growth.

Reflecting the diminished status of the strategic policies of the Local Plan, the District Council has also taken into consideration dwelling completions since the start of the plan period and latest housing commitment data from extant planning permissions within the Neighbourhood Area.

The District Council has compared its method for calculating the indicative figure against the latest evidence of housing need, namely the Local Housing Need figure for East Cambridgeshire calculated as per government's standard method.

These factors led the District Council to set an indicative housing requirement which exceeds the housing delivery identified for Witchford by the Local Plan.

To ensure the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan is prepared in a positive way, which complements the district's approach in delivering required housing growth whilst also protecting the parish from further unplanned speculative development, the Neighbourhood Plan should not depart from the up to date growth assumptions adopted

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<sup>2</sup> A 5-year land supply is a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide 5 years' worth of housing against a housing requirement set out in an adopted Local Plan, or against a local housing need



by the District. The Neighbourhood Plan has a role to play in planning for this growth in a sustainable way.

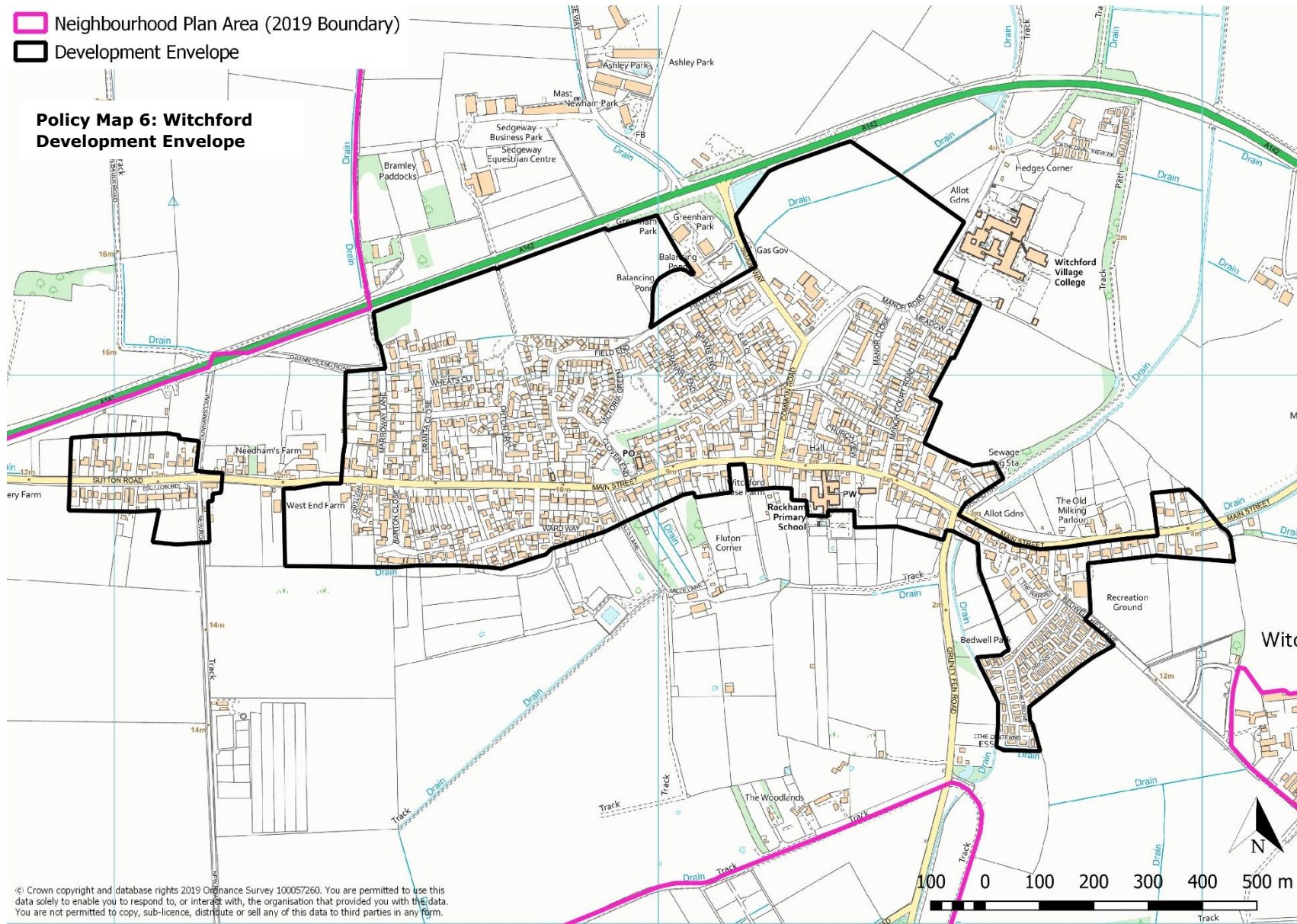
The Neighbourhood Plan therefore includes the following housing provision:

Committed development on major sites	Land north of Field End (WFD H1A)	128 homes
	Land off Marroway Lane (WFD H1B)	40 homes
	Land at Common Road (WFD H2)	116 homes
	Land to South of Main Street (WFD H3)	46 homes
		<hr/> 330 homes
Infill development within development limits	2019-31 (Assumed approximately 2 per year)	24 homes
Total	2019-31	354 homes

The Neighbourhood Plan assumes that from 2019 through to 2031 there will be a delivery of around 350 homes in Witchford Village. In 2011, Witchford had 960 homes (Census 2011). Since then there have been 24 net dwelling completions. Growth of 330 homes therefore represents a 33% increase during the period 2018 to 2031. In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan allows for further dwellings to be delivered via appropriate policy compliant infill within the Witchford development envelope.

-  Neighbourhood Plan Area (2019 Boundary)
-  Development Envelope

**Policy Map 6: Witchford Development Envelope**



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## 5.2 Landscape and character policies

The objective for landscape protection within the parish in the Plan period is:

**‘To maintain the rural fenland character of Witchford. To protect the open space between Witchford and Ely, so that the village remains a distinct and separate community’.**

### **Policy WNP LC 1 – Landscape and Settlement Character**

All development proposals shall be sensitive to the distinctive landscape and settlement character, as described in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal.

Specifically:

- locations defined on Map 8 where the landscape extends into the village shall be protected from development where this would result in undermining a strong connection between settlement and countryside;
- development proposals shall respect and not adversely impact upon the key views from the edge of Witchford village out into the countryside and the views from the countryside into the Witchford village – as identified on Map 8;
- Witchford’s historic core and its valued setting shall be conserved and where possible enhanced;
- Witchford shall remain an island settlement; the northern slopes and the low-lying landscapes which surround Witchford shall remain open; and
- the sense of arrival and distinctiveness at existing settlement gateways shall remain intact or be strengthened.

Where potential impacts on Witchford’s distinctive landscape and settlement character are identified, applicants will be expected to demonstrate accordance with these principles through the provision of an assessment of landscape and visual impacts (proportionate to the scheme proposed) and drawing, in this process, on guidance and recommendations in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal.

### 5.2.1 Intent

To ensure that the character of Witchford’s setting and landscape is protected or enhanced through: the protection of key views, keeping the land to the south of Witchford’s historic core open, retaining or reinforcing the four identified areas of landscape which currently penetrate into the settlement, and avoiding development which undermines Witchford’s distinctive island settlement character.

### 5.2.2 Policy context and reasoned justification

The National Planning Policy Framework 2018 states that planning policies and decisions should be “*sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting..*”(para 127). It also states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, inter alia, “*protecting and enhancing valued landscapes...*”

Policy WNP – LC 1 complements the national and local policy context by providing locally specific detail and criteria to guide development. The policy is underpinned by the

documentary evidence included in Appendix 1 and particularly by the evidence set out in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal (WLA) adopted by the Parish Council in January 2019. The WLA provides an understanding of the sensitivity and capacity of the Parish to accommodate new growth; it identifies special qualities to be conserved and enhanced; and includes a detailed settlement and landscape analysis which is useful in informing an appropriate approach to take in the Neighbourhood Plan.

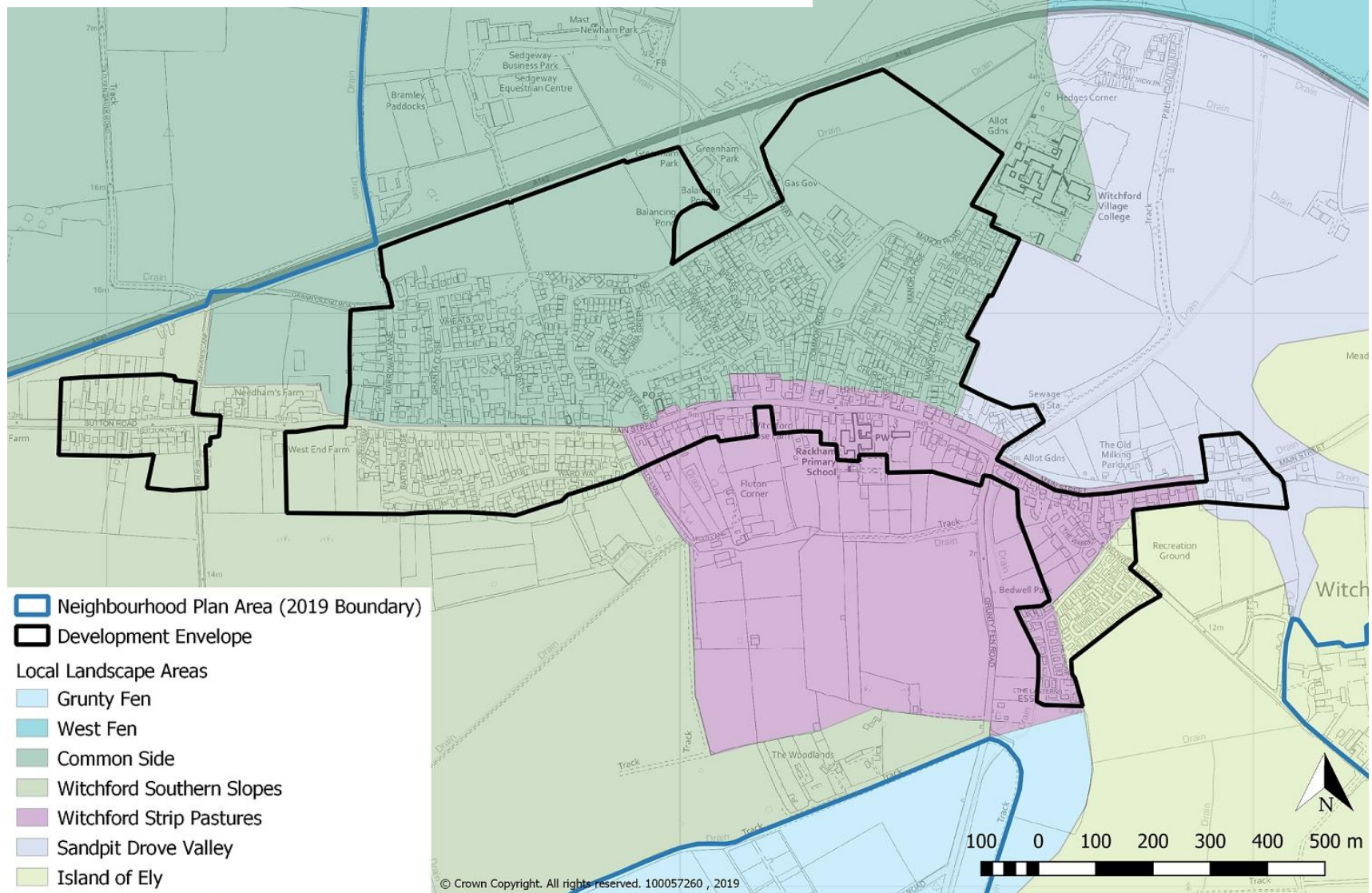
Witchford parish falls within two landscape types identified in the East of England Landscape Typology; Lowland Village Farmland and Planned Peat Fen. The WLA breaks these down further and identifies seven local landscape areas specific to the parish. These are:

- Grunty Fen – lies to the south of the village and predominantly outside the neighbourhood plan area with small section in the north extending into the plan area.
- West Fen – lies to the north of the village with half of the area extending beyond the neighbourhood plan area.
- Common Side – includes the highest land in Witchford and provides the northern setting to the village.
- Witchford Southern Slopes – forms the south facing slopes to the south of the village.
- Witchford Historic Core and Strip Pastures – include the historic core of the built-up environment and the areas immediately south on the south facing slopes
- Sandpit Drove Valley – lies to the northeast of the historic core of the village and is associated with a small valley between Witchford island and the main island of Ely.
- Island of Ely – lies to the east of Witchford and extends outside of the neighbourhood plan area to the rising land of the wider Isle of Ely.

The WLA includes a map showing the full extent of these local landscape areas, together with a detailed assessment of the areas. Map 7 focuses in on the areas in and around the village.

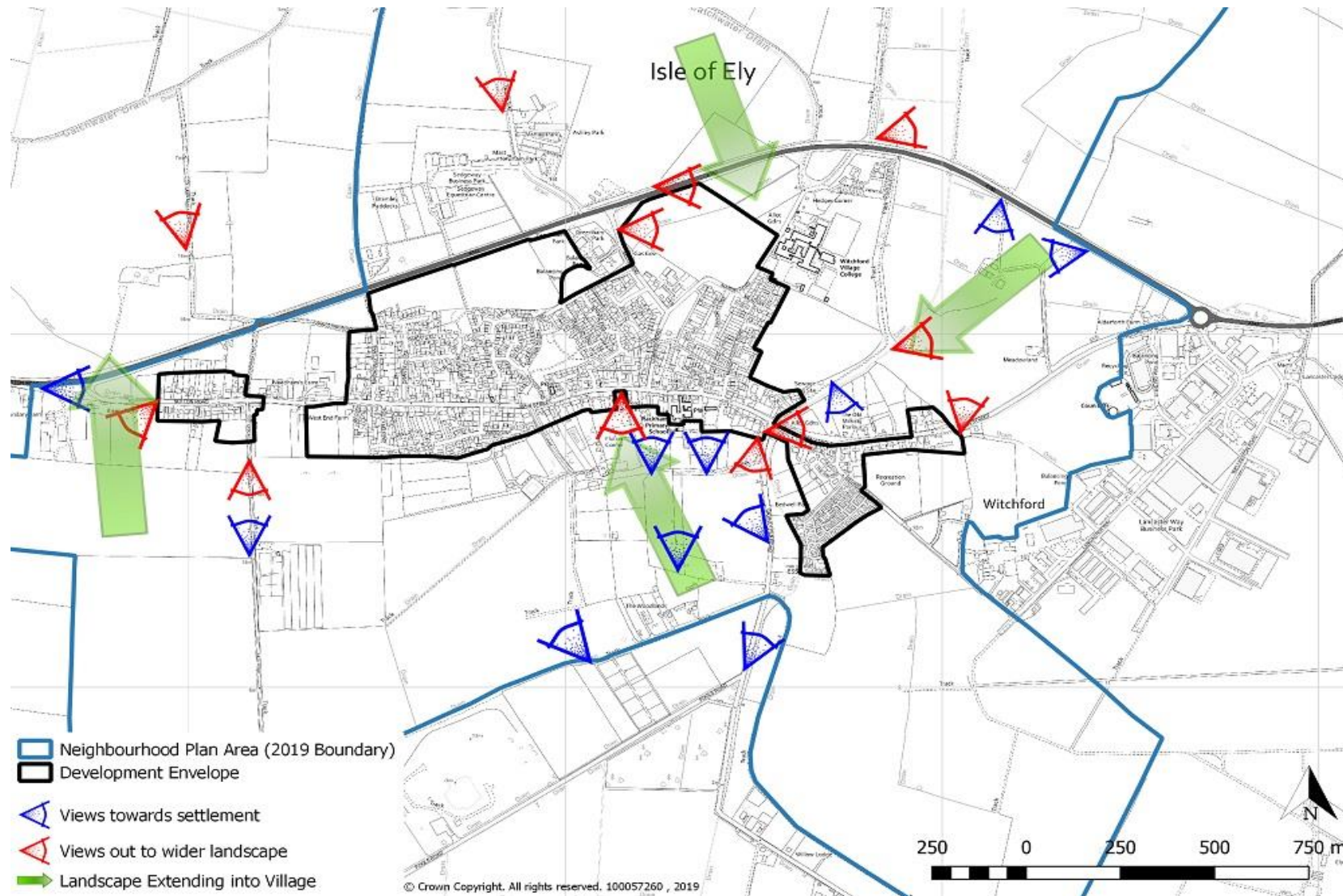


**Policy Map 7: Witchford Landscape Character Areas around Witchford Village, Map created for NP but based on Witchford LCA produced by Alison Farmer.**





**Policy Map 8: Views and Landscape extending into the village**



## Landscape areas extending into the village-

The four areas of landscape extending into the village shown on Map 8 are particularly valuable for helping to reinforce the small scale, rural character and location of the village and its historic origins as an agricultural settlement.

## Views

The protection of key views in and around the parish will help maintain a sense of place and local distinctiveness during the plan period. The position of the village on the south facing slopes means that from the settlement views outwards are primarily to the south, with the exception of those around Sandpit Drove. Similarly views towards the settlement from the wider landscape are mainly from the south (including from the proposed Local Green Space south of Main Street – see separate Local Green Space Report for detailed discussion) or from the A142. The descriptions of the views given below are extracts from the Witchford Landscape Appraisal:

**Views from the edge of the village looking south:** *These views are from elevated positions looking out across the wider fen landscape to the south. Views are often vistas from within the built form or from public rights of way which run close to the existing urban edge. These views reinforce the rural context and origins of the settlement and connect it to the fen landscape which forms its wider setting. Close to the historic core these views may be intermittent and channelled by vegetation due to the smaller scale field enclosure pattern which is typical of the immediate setting of the village. In contrast views from the settlement edge in the west are more open giving rise to wider panoramas.*

**Views from the edge of the village looking north and east:** *These views occur from the junction of the A142 and Sutton Road and are towards the rising land and highest point of the island on which Witchford sits (Little Hill). In these views the rising land forms an important landscape backdrop to the village. Further east the views from the A142 are in a northeasterly direction towards Ely Cathedral and the rising slopes of the main Isle of Ely. These views are memorable and noted as quintessential views and approaches to Ely. Beyond the A142 there are views from the north facing slopes looking northwards towards West Fen and Coveney.*

**Views towards the village from the south:** *From the wider landscape there are views back to the village from Grunty Fen Road and Pools Road as well as from public rights of way e.g. New Road (track). These views are from areas of lower elevation. The built edge is not prominent in these views, although housing along Ward Way is most visually prominent due to its elevated position on the edge of sloping land and use of white render. Elsewhere development is either set back away from the main slopes or filtered from view due to intervening vegetation.*

**Views towards the village from the north:** *There are no views of the village from the north and from West Fen. This is because the village is located on the south facing slopes to the south of the A142. There are however wide-ranging views of Sedgeway Business Park and Ashley Park. Whilst the single-storey buildings are not especially noticeable taller buildings stand out and appear large in scale. Their light colour material also increases visibility.*

## Witchford's historic core and setting

Here, buildings are predominantly historic, five of which are Grade II listed and one Grade II\* listed (St Andrew's Church seen clearly from the south in Fig. 4). Settlement character here is linear but one plot deep (unlike the area to the west which comprises cul-de-sac development) and comprises terraces of cottages fronting directly onto the pavement

with no front garden plot, and large-scale housing or former farm houses set within larger plots. The WLA describes the historic core as having a “*distinctive sinuous character descending down the hill towards the former ford crossing before rising again onto the Witchford island.*” The WLA also states:

*“To the south the land slopes down from Main Street to the wider fen landscape forming the southern slopes of the island on which the village sits. The enclosure pattern on these slopes reflects the small-scale strip field enclosures associated with the rear of properties. These enclosures do not survive elsewhere in the setting of the village and in the context of the Parish are rare. They are of historical interest forming a distinctive setting to the settlement and reinforce the distinction between the character of the island and wider fen landscape.”*

Due to the historic interest of the small-scale strip field enclosures associated with the rear of properties on Main Street, it is important that they are retained and the Parish Council will work with landowners to encourage this. The Policy WNP LC1 – Landscape and Settlement Character specifies the setting of the historic core to be conserved and, where possible, enhanced. The Neighbourhood Plan as a whole directs development away from this area since it lies outside the development envelope and is on low lying land outside the village.

There is an important gap within the built-up boundary which affords highly valued views from Main Street southwards towards the wider fen across a paddock known as ‘the Horsefield’.

This landscape character area is identified in the WLA as highly sensitive to new development:

*“Development in this area is likely to alter the relationship between the historic core of the village and its landscape setting and the small scale linear pastures which are a key characteristic immediately adjacent to the settlement edge. These qualities are tangible and easily appreciated through views from Main Street across The Horsefield and also from the public rights of way to the south of the village.”*



Fig 4. View of St Andrew's Church (part of Witchford's historic core) from Edna's Wood in the south, Photo taken December 2018



### **Witchford's character as an island settlement**

The WLA describes Witchford village as unusual for two reasons. Firstly, its proximity to Ely and secondly, its historic focus on a shallow valley which separates the wider Isle of Ely from the lower, smaller island on which the village sits. The report emphasises the importance of retaining Witchford as an island settlement and avoiding development to the north, in the Sandpit Drove Valley landscape character area or on the lower slopes as key to keeping or reinforcing local character.

## **5.3 Witchford Area of Separation**

### **WNP LC 2 –Witchford Area of Separation**

Development will be directed in a way that respects and retains the open and undeveloped nature of the distinctive valley topography that separates Witchford village from Lancaster Way Business Park and separates Witchford village from Ely.

Development proposals may only be supported in the Witchford Area of Separation (as shown on Map 9) where it can be demonstrated that proposals:

- Would not reduce the physical and / or visual separation between Witchford village and Lancaster Way Business Park;
- Would not reduce the physical and / or visual separation between Witchford village and Ely; and
- Would maintain or enhance the enjoyment of the Public Rights of Way network and links to the countryside.

To demonstrate the visual impact of a proposal applicants will be required to provide a landscape and visual impact appraisal.

### **5.3.1 Intent**

To maintain this important open rural landscape between Ely and Witchford and to provide a visual and physical separation between Lancaster Way Business Park and Witchford village and Ely and Witchford village.

### **5.3.2 Context and reasoned justification**

Keeping Witchford's identity separate from the settlement of Ely and separate from the Lancaster Way Business Park is an essential part of maintaining sense of place and rural character in Witchford. This is a priority articulated clearly by the residents during the preparation of the neighbourhood plan.

Despite the proximity of Witchford village to the neighbouring city of Ely and the Lancaster Way Business Park and despite the fact the A142 creates a link between the village with these two destinations, Witchford village has an identity distinctly separate to that of the larger settlement of Ely. The gateway into the historic core of Witchford is on Ely Road and the A142 does not feel part of the village.

The Witchford Area of Separation covers two local landscape character areas (see Maps 2 and 7 to see the locations of the local landscape character areas). It includes part of the Sandpit Drove Valley landscape character area where this falls to the east of Sandpit Drove and between the A142 and Main Street/Ely Road. It also includes parts of the Island of Ely local landscape character area where this abuts the Lancaster Way Business



Park and reaches west towards the Witchford Recreation Ground on Bedwell Hey Lane. This local landscape character area also includes a section of land on the north side of Main Street (the higher parts of land on this side of the road).



Fig. 5 Gateway to Witchford village on Ely Road, photo taken February 2019

The defined Area of Separation reinforces sense of place and separate rural identity in Witchford in three key ways:

1. Providing a physical and visual gap between the urbanised area around Lancaster Way Roundabout and Witchford village.
2. Providing a strong rural and characterful setting to the eastern edge of the village along Sandpit Drove Local Green space
3. Reinforcing Witchford's status as an island settlement as distinct from the island settlement of Ely.

#### **1. Providing a physical and visual gap between the urbanised area around Lancaster Way Roundabout and Witchford village**

The Witchford Parish boundary starts at the western side of the Lancaster Way Roundabout. This roundabout is busy at most times of the day. It provides access to the very visible collection of buildings and industrial estate which makes up the Lancaster Way Business Park and the Witchford Recycling Centre. When travelling west from Ely, the second exit of the roundabout is Ely Road/Main Street. The eastern gateway to the village of Witchford is situated further down along this road. The third and last exit is the continuation of the very busy A142 towards Chatteris.

Between the Lancaster Way Roundabout and Witchford village there is an important gap of open countryside. This gap is located in two distinct areas. One is the triangle of land created by the A142, Ely Road/Main Street and Sandpit Drove and the second is the area of open countryside between Lancaster Way Business Park and the village edge at Witchford Recreation Ground.

The first of these is readily and visually perceived from the point of the Lancaster Way Roundabout. Here there is an open view towards the west and looking downwards and west into the settlement edge of Witchford across agricultural fields and horse paddocks. Were this gap not here, Witchford would, at this point, be perceived as continuation of the urbanised feel at Lancaster Way Business Park. The higher level ground at Lancaster Way Roundabout means that this area of open land is particularly visible. For example, the tall buildings of Witchford Village College can be seen clearly from a point further east (on higher level ground towards Ely) when looking west across to Witchford.

The physical gap of open countryside between Lancaster Way Roundabout and Witchford village is also a key contributor to sense of place and rural character when travelling from the roundabout towards the eastern village gateway along Ely Road/Main Street. If travelling by car, a rural setting is provided by the established hedgerows but also the views, provided by gaps in the hedgerows of the open landscape (comprising horse paddocks and agricultural fields) towards the north. If travelling by foot or bike along the segregated footpath and cycle way, the perception of a rural backdrop and separation between the village ahead and the urban feel of both the City of Ely and the Lancaster Way Business Park behind is stronger due to the increased opportunities for views through the trees into the countryside but also due to the contrast in levels of traffic-generated noise between Lancaster Way Roundabout and the village gateway. By the time the village gateway is reached, the traffic from the A142 is considerably quieter and the traffic along Main Street reduces its speed considerably to meet the 30mph speed limit. Along the section of Main Street which falls within the Island of Ely local landscape character area (where the land is higher), there are no views and instead the high verges of trees and hedgerows provide enclosure before opening up again at the point of the village gateway.



Fig. 6: View from Lancaster Way Roundabout looking west and downwards towards Witchford. The A142 can be seen on the right and the tall structures of Witchford Village College on the horizon.

To the south of Ely Road/Main Street the Island of Ely local landscape character area is on higher ground but the gap of open land between the Waste Recycling Centre and the village gateway is nevertheless important to reinforcing the sense of arrival at the village edge. From the village edge at Witchford Recreation Ground (off Bedwell Hey Lane), both the Witchford Recycling Centre and Lancaster Way Business Park are visible in the distance beyond the trees (perhaps made more visible due to the fact they are located on higher level ground than the Recreation Ground). The area of open land defined here

is essential in preventing further erosion in the sense of separateness between Witchford Village and Lancaster Way Business Park.

## **2. Providing a strong rural and characterful setting to the eastern edge of the village along Sandpit Drove Local Green space**

The valley landscape in the Sandpit Drove local landscape character area provides a strong rural and characterful setting to the Sandpit Drove Local Green Space and the Broadway Allotments Local Green Space. These are popular and well managed open spaces providing visual, biodiversity and recreational value and interest. The Sandpit Drove Local Green Space is connected through safe paths along the southern perimeter of the A142 to other parts of the village including Witchford Village College and Manor Road allotments.

This rural setting to Witchford is experienced by users of the Local Green Space as well as people using the Broadway Allotments. But it is also perceived from the A142 (travelling east to west).

## **3. Reinforcing Witchford's status as an island settlement as distinct from the island settlement of Ely.**

From various points along the Sandpit Drove Local Green Space there are impressive, long distance views, across an open valley landscape, of Ely Cathedral, identified in the Local Plan as quintessential views. These views provide a sense of intervisibility between the two settlements, reinforcing their long-standing identity as two distinct island settlements. The open valley landscape contributes considerably to the setting of these views.



Fig. 7: A long distance view from Sandpit Drove Local Green Space across the Sandpit Drove valley landscape character area towards Ely Cathedral. Vehicles travelling along the A142 can also be seen.

The sensitivities of the valley landscape in this part of the plan area are described in more detail in the WLA – see assessment for both Sandpit Drove Valley local landscape character area and Isle of Ely local landscape character area.

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 demonstrated that there is overwhelming support among Witchford residents for retaining the physical separation of the village from Ely, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree %
The land between Witchford, the bypass and Lancaster Way business park should	68.87	15.93

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree %
remain free from development		

Comments from questionnaire respondents also illustrate the support for retaining Witchford's separation and distinctiveness:

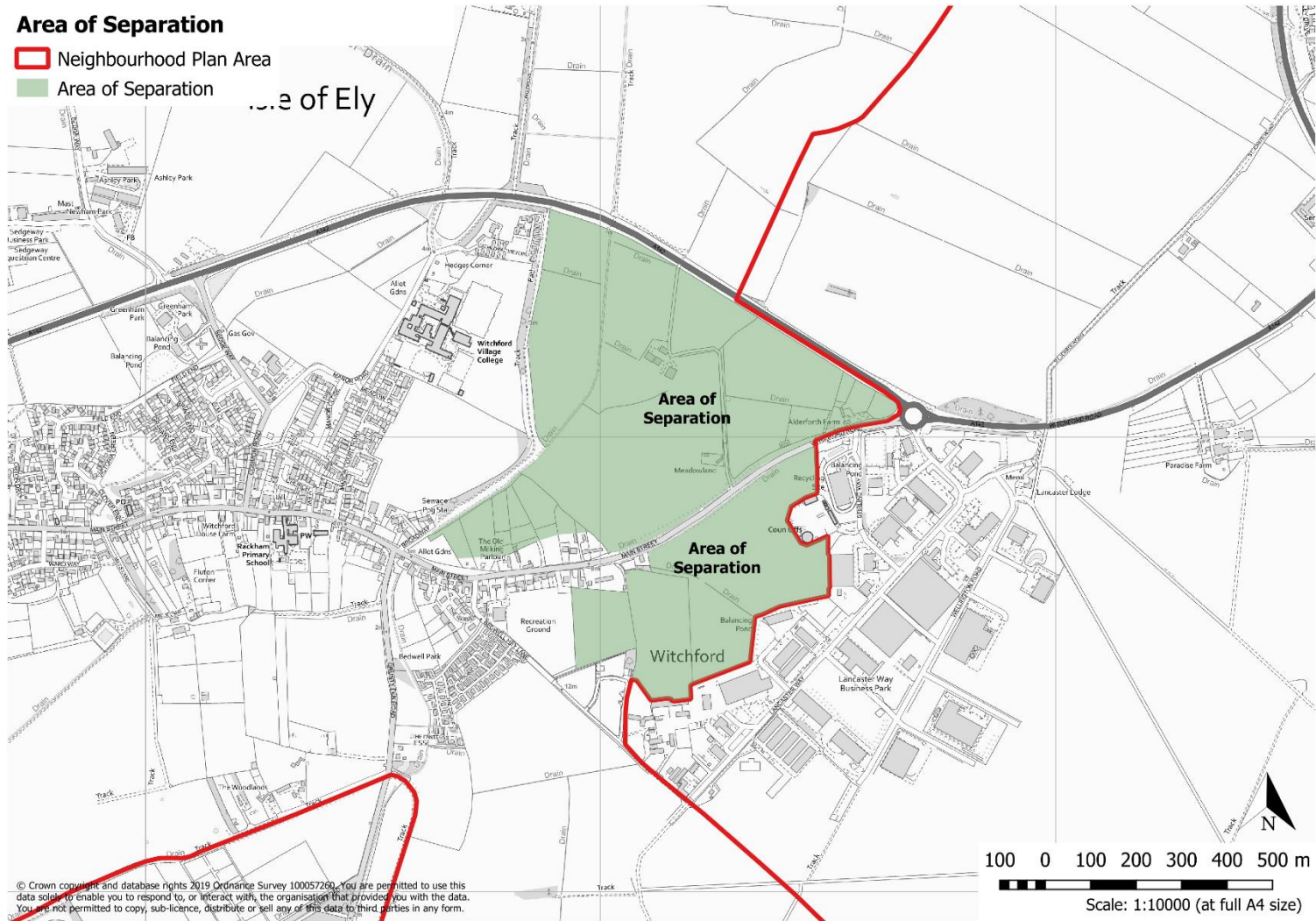
*'Particularly unhappy with proposal to develop between Witchford, the bypass and Lancaster Way'*

*'Witchford is a rural village and residents in the village on the whole want to keep it this way and not an extension of Ely making it built up'*

*'Keep the village as a village and not a suburb of Ely'*

*'Don't turn it into Ely overspill'*





Policy Map 9: Witchford Area of Separation

## 5.4 Green infrastructure

The objective for green infrastructure within the parish in the Plan period is:

**'To identify, protect and enhance the green infrastructure, open spaces and valued views of Witchford and the opportunities to enjoy the Witchford countryside'.**

### **Policy WNP GI1 – Public Rights of Way**

Development proposals that will enhance or extend an existing public right of way or that will deliver a new public right of way in a suitable location will be viewed favourably.

Development proposals shall maintain or enhance the amenity value of any public right of way involved in the development.

#### 5.4.1 Intent

To maintain the amenity value of the existing network of public rights of way in the parish and to seek improvements to this network.

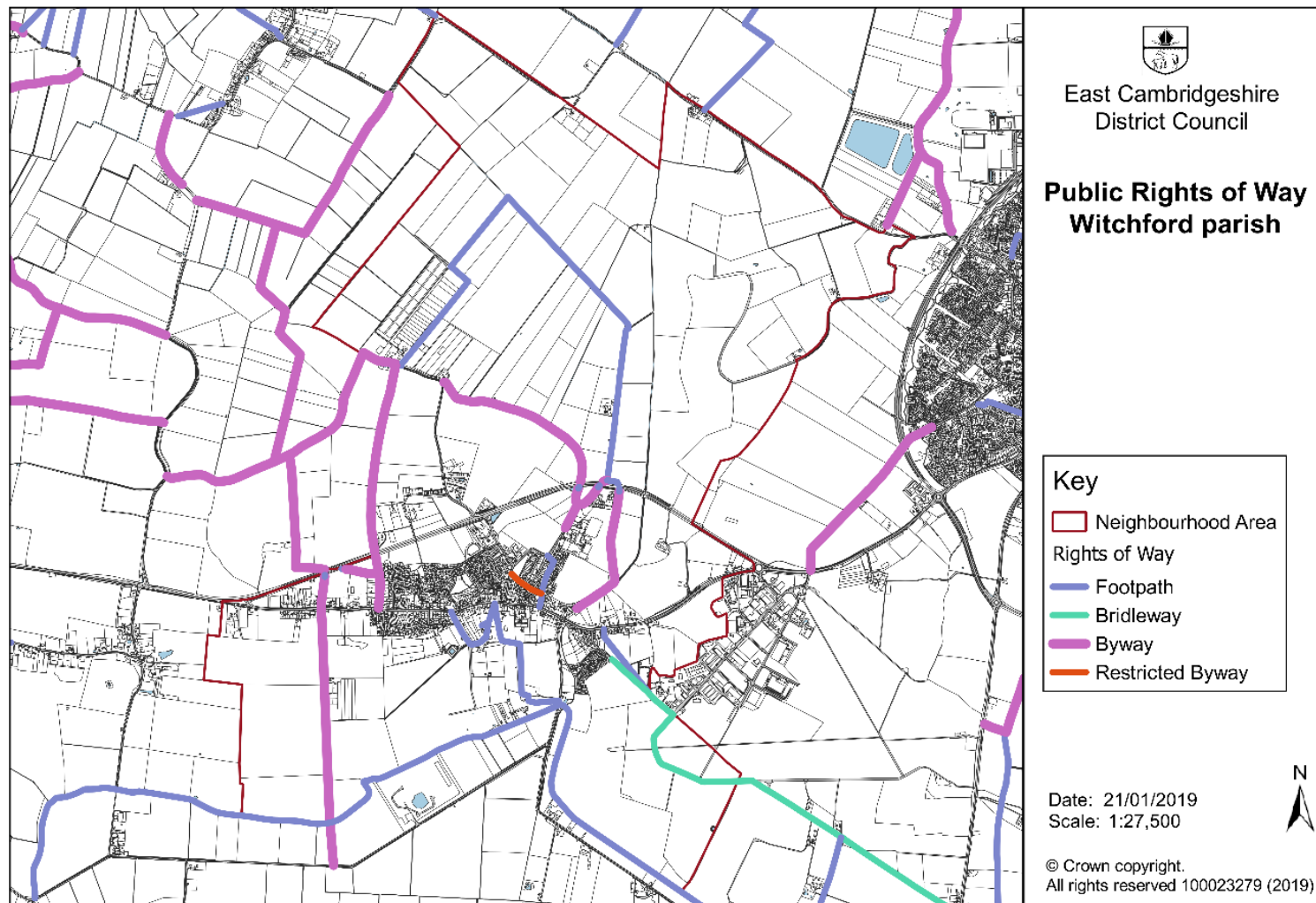
#### 5.4.2 Policy Context and Justification

The network of public rights of way in the parish as shown on Policy Map 10 is highly valued, offering opportunities for outdoor recreation for ramblers, dog walkers, horseriders, cyclists and those simply wishing to get around by foot. The retention of this network is essential for the purpose of maintaining residential amenity. Public footpaths are for pedestrians only, public bridleways for pedestrians, horseriders and cyclists, restricted byways for pedestrians, horseriders, cyclists and users of non-mechanically propelled vehicles and byways open to all traffic for all classes of user.

The amenity value of a public right of way will be considered to be impacted adversely if currently valued views (see Policy Map 8) are obstructed, there is loss of open spaces which contribute to the setting and enjoyment of public rights of way or there is loss or damage to hedgerows, trees and vegetation which provide amenity value through attracting wildlife. Opportunities will be sought for the visual enhancement of the public right of way around the perimeter of the former airfield as identified in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal.

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 demonstrated that there is overwhelming support among Witchford residents for the protection of the rural feel of public rights of way, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree%
Paths and open green spaces in and around the village should keep their rural character	91.40	6.14



Policy Map 10: Public Rights of Way

### **Policy WNP – GI2 Local Green Space**

The following sites as shown on Map 11 are designated as Local Green Spaces

- Sandpit Drove
- Old Scenes Drove
- Long Meadow
- Edna's Wood
- Fairchild Wood
- Old Recreation Ground and Community Orchard
- Victoria Green
- Millennium Wood
- Manor Road allotments
- The Common, Common Road
- Public Open Space between Orton Drive & Wheats Close
- Broadway allotments
- The 'Horsefield'

Development on these sites will not be acceptable other than in very special circumstances in line with national policy, or where it will enhance the function of the space (e.g. play equipment on Victoria Green) without compromising the primary function of the space as a Local Green Space.

#### **5.4.3 Intent**

To recognise the value of these sites to the local community by giving them Local Green Space protection

#### **5.4.4 Context and reasoned justification**

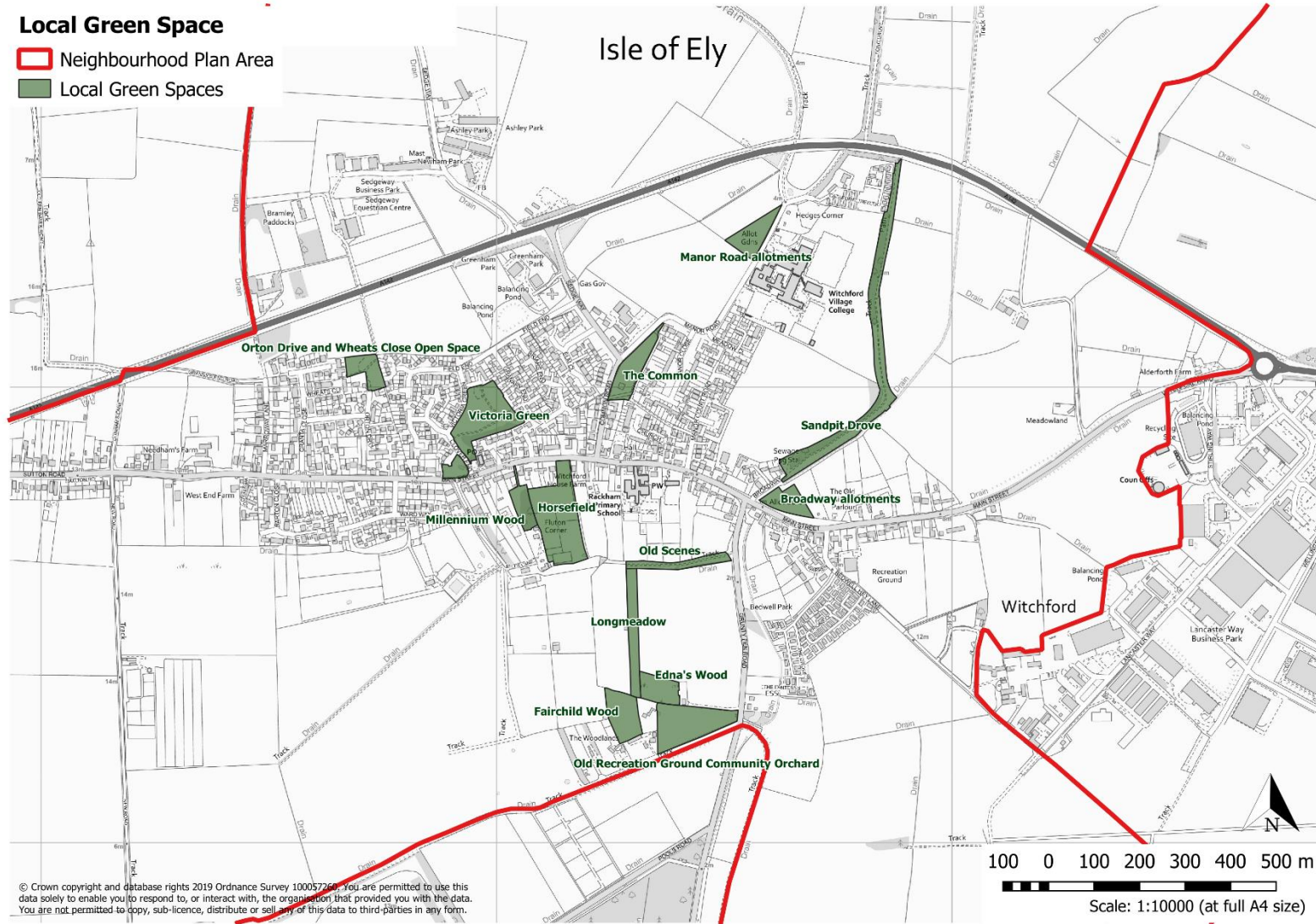
The criteria for Local Green Space designation are set out in paragraph 100 of the NPPF. This states that Local Green Space should be:

- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- demonstrably special to the local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

This policy is underpinned by the documentary evidence included in Appendix 1 and in particular by the Witchford Local Green Spaces Report (May 2019).

The Witchford Local Green Spaces Report (May 2019) contains a detailed assessment of the proposed Local Green Spaces against the NPPF criteria and a full justification for their designation.





Policy Map 11: Local Green Space



**Policy WNP – GI3 Development and Biodiversity**

Development should avoid adverse impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity by creating, restoring and enhancing habitats for the benefit of species. In doing so, applicants must seek to retain and where possible enhance the network of species and habitats currently present in the parish.

Development proposals are supported where they enhance biodiversity in the parish through designing in green infrastructure measures as part of the design and layout of a scheme. Such measures include:

- Trees, hedgerows, water and other habitats integrated into the development;
- Wildflower verges along roads and formal open spaces;
- Lighting designed to avoid disturbing wildlife;
- Bat roosts and bird boxes;
- Features and corridors to help invertebrates, reptiles, hedgehogs and other mammals.

Development proposals should also include measures to decrease flood risk that are in accordance with Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) principles and which will enhance biodiversity. Such measures include:

- Wildlife-friendly green roofs and walls;
- Permeable driveways;
- Swales and rain gardens enhancing landscape, connectivity and biodiversity; and
- Attenuation ponds suitable for wetland wildlife.

**5.4.5 Intent**

To complement the policy approach taken in the Local Plan through policy ENV 7: Biodiversity and geology. This policy is intended to complement policy H3 Housing Design.

**5.4.6 Context and justification**

This policy is underpinned by the documentary evidence included in Appendix 1.

A search using [www.magic.gov.uk](http://www.magic.gov.uk) will reveal the presence of a wide range of birdlife present in the parish including a range of farmland birds, corn bunting, yellow wagtail, turtle dove, tree sparrow, lapwing and grey partridge. The parish is home to a number of local open spaces which are important wildlife habitats. This includes Sandpit Drove, the network of sites to the south of Main Street including Millennium Wood, Edna's Wood, Fairchild Wood, hedgerows (for example, along Long Meadow, Old Scenes Drove) and woodland (for example areas of deciduous woodland to the south of Main Street along Mills Lane). Further information is detailed in the Witchford Local Green Space Supporting Information document and the Witchford Green Spaces Log.

As development proposals come forward, it is appropriate to expect measures to be incorporated which help to maintain and enhance the tapestry of species and habitats in the parish. This could be through retaining or restoring hedgerows and ponds as well as through site drainage features that benefit biodiversity (green roofs and other elements of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)).

The Neighbourhood Plan supports the recommendations set out in The Wildlife Trusts' 2018 publication 'Homes for People and Wildlife'. The measures which new development proposals could incorporate as a means to enhancing biodiversity in the parish are

informed by the recommendations set out in that report. Applicants are also encouraged to refer to this.

The Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 demonstrated that there is overwhelming support among Witchford residents for measures to protect and enhance biodiversity, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree%
All new developments must demonstrate that they will maintain or improve wildlife habitats	81.08	14.99

## 5.5 Housing Policies

The objective for housing development within the parish in the Plan period is:

**'To maintain a thriving community through the provision of housing to meet the range of needs of current and future residents of Witchford'.**

### **Policy WNP H1 – Housing Mix**

Residential development that contributes to meeting existing and future needs of the village will be supported. A mix in the size and tenure of housing will be required taking into account the needs of young people looking for smaller homes as well as the needs of older residents. Where there is up to date evidence of a need for homes to be accessible and adaptable they should be built to the accessible and adaptable M4(2) standard other than where it can be demonstrated in a full financial appraisal that the application of the standard would make the development unviable.

### 5.5.1 Intent

New housing developments coming forward in the parish should be specifically aimed at meeting parish needs and include a range of housing types. This will help enable local people to stay in the parish at different stages of their lifetime.

It is particularly important that the stock of smaller homes is increased in the parish. The provision of housing choice will assist in ensuring a range of needs are met.

Provision of a mix of house sizes will establish successful new neighbourhoods with broad based communities. Provision of housing types for a range of occupiers will encourage activity at different times of the day (for example, retired people and younger families are more likely to enliven a place during the working day). The overconcentration of many larger homes or many smaller homes should therefore be avoided.

### 5.5.2 Context and reasoned justification

This policy is underpinned by the documentary evidence included in Appendix 1 and in particular by the Demographic and Socio-Economic report for the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan, which finds that Witchford's existing housing stock is limited in terms of choice and range. The housing is dominated by owner occupation and there is little rented property available whether affordable or market. The majority of the housing

is detached or semi-detached albeit there are two mobile home parks that offer relatively low-cost accommodation.

Witchford's population has a distinctive age profile, with a high proportion of school age children, above average levels of people aged in their 40s and normal levels of those aged 50+. However, the proportion of people in their 20s is very low, about half the county average.

In general house prices are well above average for East Cambridgeshire and there is a particularly high premium for larger properties which can be explained through a high demand from families in this location. Whilst it is recognised there is a high market demand for larger homes in Witchford village, it is very important that new housing stock also includes smaller homes which can cater for the needs and demands of older members of the community as well as younger adults and younger families.

Evidence of demand for smaller homes and bungalows can be demonstrated from the results of a survey of Ely estate agents carried out in October 2018. Four estate agents responded to the survey (three both sales and lettings, one lettings only). The surveys demonstrate an excess of demand over supply in flats, bedsits, bungalows, detached, shared and affordable housing, and an excess of demand over supply for one and two bedroom properties, in both the sales and lettings sector. Quotes from the Platinum Properties Letting Agency survey response refer to this as a strong trend:

*'We have seen demand increase massively over the last 10 years. We have a large number of migrant workers in this locality as well as younger households struggling with the affordability of purchasing'*

*'Demand for 2 and 3 bedroom homes continues to increase'*

*'I would suggest there is a shortage of retirement homes'*

The Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 asked for detailed responses on housing demand, with the following results:

Type of homes needed	Strongly Agree %	Slightly Agree %
Social housing/housing association (rental)	20.5	37.22
Affordable housing (up to £250,000)	54.29	32.52
Shared ownership housing	23.13	47.19
Flats	9.03	29.91
Bungalows	17.55	52.35
Semi-detached	34.06	55.00
Sheltered	28.17	41.08
Detached	23.27	49.69
Residential/Nursing	30.82	47.48
Park homes	6.25	27.19
Bedsits	3.47	21.77

Comments from questionnaire respondents also illustrate the range of demand:

*'More two beds bungalows to be built for downsizing to release 4 bed family homes'*

*'We have enough expensive detached houses in the village. We need a lot more affordable houses for young people to buy'*

*'Affordable homes and a variety of types of dwellings need to be built for our young people as well as older generations'*

*'The focus on housing has to be a complete mixture to meet the diverse needs of the population'*

*'Starter homes. 3 / 4 bed homes'*

#### **Policy WNP H2 Affordable Housing on Rural Exception Sites**

Proposals for small scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites for people with a Witchford connection on the edge of the village are supported provided that:

- the proposed development, by virtue of their size, scale and type, will not exceed the identified local needs for affordable housing;
- the types of dwellings proposed meet the needs identified in Witchford as identified in an up to date housing needs survey;
- the homes are located within easy access to Witchford village centre,
- the affordable housing is provided in perpetuity; and
- no significant harm would be caused to the character of the village, its setting or the countryside.

#### **5.5.3 Intent**

To adopt a supportive approach to the delivery of additional rural exception sites within the parish where it can be demonstrated that the schemes will meet Witchford's specific needs.

#### **5.5.4 Context and reasoned justification**

The Demographic and Socio-Economic Review undertaken to inform this Neighbourhood Plan demonstrates clearly that house prices and rental costs for all property sizes in Witchford are challenging for low income families. The number of households with a Witchford connection on the district's housing register was 38 as at September 2019. This is likely to be an underestimate of the housing needs in the parish.

Some affordable housing units will be provided as part of the permitted and allocated sites in the parish. However, these will not be prioritised for households with a strong connection to the parish. If, however, Witchford's affordable housing need is not fully met through these schemes, it is important that the community take a positive approach towards rural exception sites - but only where it can be demonstrated that the scheme will meet Witchford-specific needs.

Paragraph 77 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs.



Adopted Local Plan policy HOU 4: Affordable Housing Exception Sites provides a district-wide policy approach towards rural exception sites. The policy allows for an element of open market housing (maximum 20%) to be provided as part of such schemes but only where it is demonstrated through financial appraisal that the open market housing is essential to enable delivery of the site for primarily affordable housing.

It is not considered appropriate for market housing to come forward as part of rural exception schemes in Witchford and the Neighbourhood Plan supports the approach taken in the Local Plan, whereby any market housing must be justified through a robust financial appraisal that demonstrates the market housing as being essential to the overall viability of the scheme.

The Witchford Landscape Appraisal provides guidance regarding edge of settlement locations where there may be capacity for small scale schemes to come forward without causing harm to landscape character or setting of the village.

Access to affordable housing featured strongly in the feedback from community consultations throughout the Plan development period, and a report detailing this is included in Appendix 1 as part of the evidence underpinning this policy.

#### **Policy WNP H3 Housing Design**

All residential development schemes will be expected to achieve high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and building. Schemes shall complement and enhance local distinctiveness and character by retaining or enhancing the special qualities of Witchford and its setting (as described in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal).

All residential development shall contribute positively to the quality of Witchford as a place. Major development proposals will demonstrate how a scheme does this through a completed Building for Life 12 assessment or a similar assessment demonstrating sustainable design.

Where affordable housing units are being provided as part of a larger market housing scheme or together with market housing, the affordable housing unit should be designed as integral to the scheme and be generally indistinguishable from open market housing.

#### **5.5.5 Intent**

To help build successful neighbourhoods which function well and integrate with the existing village. Planning applicants will be expected to refer to the Witchford Landscape Appraisal to understand the distinguishing qualities for Witchford village and its wider setting within the landscape. This policy is intended to complement policy GI3 Development and Biodiversity. This policy complements the more strategic approach taken in Local Plan policy ENV2 which states that *"Design which fails to have regard to local context including architectural traditions and does not take advantage of opportunities to preserve, enhance or enrich the character, appearance and quality of an area will not be acceptable and planning applications will be refused"*.

#### **5.5.6 Context and Reasoned Justification**

It is clearly evident from the community consultation undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan that many residents are concerned about the scale of the planned housing growth

in the village and the impact of the growth on the existing character of Witchford as well as access to amenities. The level of growth expected makes it particularly important that new schemes are well thought through in terms of design and delivery of high-quality places, to ensure a high level of residential amenity but also successful community cohesion over the plan period. It is very important that the design and layout of new development facilitates the creation of cohesive, safe and pleasant neighbourhoods where new occupants feel comfortable integrating with their immediate neighbourhood as well as the village as a whole. In order to achieve this, any affordable housing element of a scheme should be fully integrated and indistinguishable from the development as a whole.

The Witchford Landscape Appraisal (WLA) provides a useful analysis of existing character in both Witchford village and across the wider parish. Applicants will be expected to refer to this work in their own design process. The WLA identifies the following special qualities of Witchford and its setting which are relevant when considering the design and layout of residential development:

- Loose arrangement of dwellings to the west with breaks in the built form, gives rise to a rural character;
- Village edges are predominately indented and organic in character to the south;
- Remnant orchards within and on the margins of the settlement;
- Notable views out of the settlement from Main Street particularly to the south due to the drop in elevation towards Grunty Fen, reinforcing the location of the village and perceptions of a rural community;
- Key built and natural landmarks such as churches/cathedral and fen islands reinforce sense of place and orientation within the wider landscape

The landscape and settlement analysis included in the WLA notes some changes which have resulted in minor loss to the distinctive qualities of the village and identifies changes to avoid. The changes that are relevant when considering the design and layout of residential development are listed below.

Avoid:

- the location of new housing on the southern edge of the village which is visible from surrounding lower land;
- the use of inappropriate building materials and sub-urban building forms;
- high density and abrupt urban edges;
- alterations to the existing settlement gateways which weaken sense of arrival and distinctiveness even if new development is proposed;
- loss of key views to surrounding landmarks;
- loss of visual and physical connectivity between the village and wider landscape
- loss of hedgerows and remnant orchards; and
- loss of meadows/grasslands and ponds.

The WLA also includes the following development guidelines (on page 37) which are applicable when new development is being considered:

- Avoid cul-de-sac developments which do not reflect lane hierarchy and form of the settlement;
- Seek always to ensure permeability through new housing areas, connecting any new development into the heart of the existing settlement;
- Avoid extending gateways into the wider landscape where new development is proposed - avoid the development of roundabouts at the junction of the settlement with major roads which are uncharacteristic and undermine the rural 'village' character of the settlement;

- Avoid cumulative effects of small housing schemes which collectively, over time, extend the urban edge and relate poorly to one another – seek wider masterplans and visions for broader areas linking in aspirations for open space, reinforcement of rural landscape setting, views and vistas, public rights of way/circular countryside walks and recreation;
- Avoid infill development which undermines the rural character of the village or connectivity to the wider landscape setting and which affects key sequential views along Main Street and lanes.

Building for Life 12 is a government endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. The scheme includes twelve criteria that new residential schemes can be assessed against. These are grouped under three headings as follows:

Integrating into the neighbourhood

1. Connections
2. Facilities and Services
3. Public Transport
4. Meeting local housing requirements

Creating a place

5. Character
6. Working with the site and its context
7. Creating well defined streets and spaces
8. Easy to find your way around

Street and home

9. Streets for all
10. Car parking
11. Public and private spaces
12. External storage and amenity space

Further information on Building for Life 12 can be found at [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)

This Neighbourhood Plan also supports The Wildlife Trusts' 'A New Way to Build' approach as detailed in The Wildlife Trusts' paper '*Housing for People and Wildlife*' January 2018 included in Appendix 1.

In this policy, 'major development schemes' includes all schemes of ten or more dwellings.

## 5.6 Site Specific Allocations

### **Housing Proposal WNP WFDH1B**

Land is proposed for housing development off Marroway Lane for up to 40 homes. The following site-specific considerations and requirements will apply to reserved matter applications and any future applications on this site:

- The retention of landscape buffer between the village edge and the A142 as a way of maintaining separation.
- An identified need for streetscape improvements through tree planting.
- A requirement to set aside land for the delivery of a west-east pedestrian and cycle spine route from Marroway Lane to Common Road through the southern part of the site.
- Incorporation of a surface water drainage scheme for the site based on sustainable drainage principles and which delivers biodiversity benefits.

Delivery of the section of the west-east pedestrian and cycle spine route from Marroway Lane eastward to Field End.

#### 5.6.1 Intent

Development is consented for 128 new homes in the eastern part of WFD H1 (WFD H1A) and is under construction. The western part of the site (WFD HB) has outline planning consent for the development of 40 new homes

This housing proposal is included in the plan to ensure important principles for the development are established and in place ready for the detailed consent application and, in the event of the current permissions expiring, in place ready for future applications. In this particular case, where WFD H1A is now under construction, it is important to ensure the delivery of WFD H1B is designed as an integral and logical part of the new neighbourhood.

#### 5.6.2 Context and reasoned justification

A key aspiration of the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan is the creation of a west-east segregated pedestrian and cycle spine route through the north side of the village, from Sutton Road through to Witchford Village College but potentially extending to the Lancaster Way cyclepath. The scheme will maximise travel mode choices for residents wishing to access neighbouring residential areas, Witchford Village College and cycle routes towards Ely. Full details of the route are included in the Witchford Pedestrian and Cycle Spine Route document, adopted as policy by Witchford Parish Council in January 2019.

The WLA recommends improvements in the streetscape along Field End through new tree planting.

This housing proposal is located in the Common Side Local Landscape Character Area, as described in the WLA. The WLA advises that new development should not sit close to the A142 and that an open landscape buffer should remain between the A142 and the village edge. In this particular location, the existing gap between the A142 and the village edge is considered to be an important part of how Witchford retains its separate village identity. The WLA states that it is important that an indented village edge and sense of separation from the A142 is retained.



**Housing Proposal WNP WFDH2**

Land is proposed for housing development at Common Road for up to 120 homes. The following site-specific considerations and requirements will apply to reserved matter applications and any future applications on this site:

- The retention of a landscape buffer between the village edge and the A142 as a way of maintaining separation.
- Low lying land to the north of the site including the ditches to be used for land drainage and maximise potential of landscape value through sensitively designed land drainage scheme.
- Setting aside land for a west east pedestrian and cycle spine route from Common Road through to Witchford Village College.
- Incorporation of a surface water drainage scheme for the site based on sustainable drainage principles and which delivers biodiversity benefits.
- Delivery of this section of the west east pedestrian and cycle spine route from Common Road through to Witchford Village College.

**5.6.3 Intent**

This site has the benefit of outline planning consent. This housing proposal is included in the plan to ensure important principles for the development are established and in place ready for detailed consent application and, in the event of the current permission expiring, in place ready for future decision making.

**5.6.4 Context and reasoned justification**

A key aspiration of the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan is the creation of a west-east segregated pedestrian and cycle spine route through the north side of the village, from Sutton Road through to Witchford Village College but potentially extending to the Lancaster Way cyclepath. The scheme will maximise travel mode choices for residents wishing to access neighbouring residential areas, Witchford Village College and cycle routes towards Ely. Full details of the route are included in the Witchford Pedestrian and Cycle Spine Route document, adopted as policy by Witchford Parish Council in January 2019.

This housing proposal is located in the Common Side Local Landscape Character Area, as described in the WLA. The WLA advises that new development should not sit close to the A142 and that an open landscape buffer should remain between the A142 and the village edge. In this particular location, the existing gap between the A142 and the village edge is considered to be an important part of how Witchford retains its separate village identity. The WLA states that it is important that an indented village edge and sense of separation from the A142 is retained.

## 5.7 Infrastructure Policies

The objective for infrastructure development within the parish in the Plan period is:

**‘To encourage and promote the provision of sufficient infrastructure, amenities and services to allow Witchford to retain its character as a self-sustaining, thriving community’.**

### **Policy WNP IC1 - Witchford Infrastructure and Community Facilities**

Provision of new and improved infrastructure in the plan area should be informed by the following two overriding infrastructure priorities identified by the community:

- Improving pedestrian and cycle links from Witchford to provide greater connectivity between Witchford and Ely
- Traffic management to reduce congestion and deter A142 traffic from using the village as a ‘rat run’

All development proposals in the plan area should contribute towards infrastructure priorities where it is necessary to make the development acceptable and where directly, fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

### 5.7.1 Intent

This policy is intended to complement Local Plan Policy GROWTH 3: Infrastructure Priorities. This policy states that *“Development proposals will be expected to provide or contribute towards the cost of providing infrastructure and community facilities made necessary by the development, where this is not provided through the Community Infrastructure Levy. This will be through on or off site provision or through financial payments, and secured via planning conditions or planning obligations (Section 106 agreements)”*. Policy GROWTH 3 is complemented by a vision for Witchford as set out in section 8 of the Local Plan.

Through this Neighbourhood Plan, the Witchford community have identified improvements to crossing facilities at the A10 from Witchford into Ely, alongside the need to invest in traffic management measures which will reduce overall congestion, as a higher priority over other measures. It is recognised that as the A10 junction is outside the Neighbourhood Area the WNP cannot make proposals relating to it but developments can contribute to the improvement of sustainable transport infrastructure within the Neighbourhood Area.

It is not the intention of this policy to undermine delivery of necessary on-site infrastructure needs that are triggered by a particular scheme, such as on-site play and open space provision. However, where schemes are found to have impacts on village traffic congestion (for example by virtue of their size or occupier type) or where schemes raise questions regarding access to shops and services for those without access to a car, it will be deemed appropriate for such impacts to be mitigated through off-site contributions towards managing traffic congestion in the village and/or improving pedestrian or cycle connectivity between Witchford Village and Ely.

### 5.7.2 Context and reasoned justification

An assessment of the infrastructure priorities indicated in the Local Plan is provided below.

Local Plan Chapter 8 Priority	NP Update
1. Improvements to pedestrian/cycle routes Suggestions: Foot/cycle bridge to cross A10 from BP garage into Ely. Pedestrian path on Grunty Fen road from Main Street. Increase width of footpath/cycle paths along Ely Road/Main street and Sutton Road	This is still the top priority shared by the Witchford community
2. Improvements to sports grounds/open space Suggestions: New netball courts at Bedwell Hey Lane recreation ground. Improvements to Victoria Green Park. Improvements to Common Road play area.	The need for additional netball infrastructure is not something that has been articulated through public consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan to date. Demand for improved play opportunities was expressed in the February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire, e.g. for wild play, skate park, updated play equipment at Victoria Green play park, outdoor gym equipment.
3. Improvements to the community/village hall	This is covered in Policy WNP IC2
4. More school places	The provision of education facilities is considered a priority when there is a need. As at spring 2019, there are no known capacity issues at either Rackham Primary School or Witchford college (secondary school). It is also recognised that previous capacity issues (created by out of catchment children coming into Witchford) were alleviated once additional primary schools had been opened in Ely and Littleport (i.e. the Isle of Ely primary school and Littleport and East Cambs Academy).

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 showed the following support for provision of facilities for young people:

	Strongly Agree %	Slightly Agree %
Increase facilities for the under-5s	28.17	51.27
Increase facilities for 5 – 11 years children	41.33	44.64
Increase facilities for 11-16 years young people	60.66	32.23
Increase facilities for 17 – 24 years young people	47.45	37.24

### Future primary and secondary school expansion

#### 5.7.3

It is acknowledged that the County Council anticipates a future shortfall in secondary school places due to an expected increase in secondary school-aged pupils in the catchment area during the plan period, together with an increase triggered by planned

development. There is capacity on the existing Witchford Village College site for any required expansion to take place.

It is also acknowledged that the County Council has identified a potential shortfall in primary school and early years places if additional development (not included as part of the Neighbourhood Plan) comes forward on sites outside the development envelope and as departures from the Neighbourhood Plan/Local Plan. However, primary school-aged pupils in the catchment area are expected to decline from 246 down to 180 by 2025/26. This means that a future deficit will depend on the extent to which planning applications on sites which conflict with the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan are approved.

The County Council has indicated that there is little or no capacity for Rackham Primary School to expand on the existing site. When there is more certainty with regard to actual demand for future primary and early years places (e.g. once the existing planning applications are determined), it will be appropriate for the position regarding capacity to be reviewed. If, at this point, there is an evidenced need for additional primary school space to be provided, then the question of where and how this comes forward can be addressed as part of a review of the Neighbourhood Plan, in consultation with resident and stakeholder involvement. At this point in time, there are two broad areas which the Neighbourhood Plan group consider could be appropriate locations for future primary and secondary school capacity, subject to evidence of need being in place and subject to further consultation on this with the community and key stakeholders. These areas of search are shown on Map 'Areas of Search for Possible Future Education Infrastructure' submitted alongside this Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council will continue to liaise with the County Council, the community and other stakeholders with regard to primary and secondary school provision as the situation evolves (see Chapter 6. Community Projects).

#### **Policy WNP IC2 -Witchford Village Hall and Recreation Ground**

The Neighbourhood Plan allocates the village hall and associated recreation ground and open space as defined on Map 12 for the provision of expanded and enhanced village hall facilities.

The following criteria apply:

- It must be demonstrated clearly how any proposed new recreation or sports facility benefits local residents (including teenagers and young adults in the parish) and promotes inclusive activities for local people and the wider community.
- The quantity and quality of the open recreation space must be retained or enhanced.
- It must be demonstrated how additional demand for car parking will be accommodated within the allocated land

The provision of serviced office space that could both support the Witchford micro economy and generate rent income for purpose of maintaining village hall facilities will be supported as part of a proposal.

In some development proposals, it may be appropriate to meet open space provision



#### 5.7.4 Intent

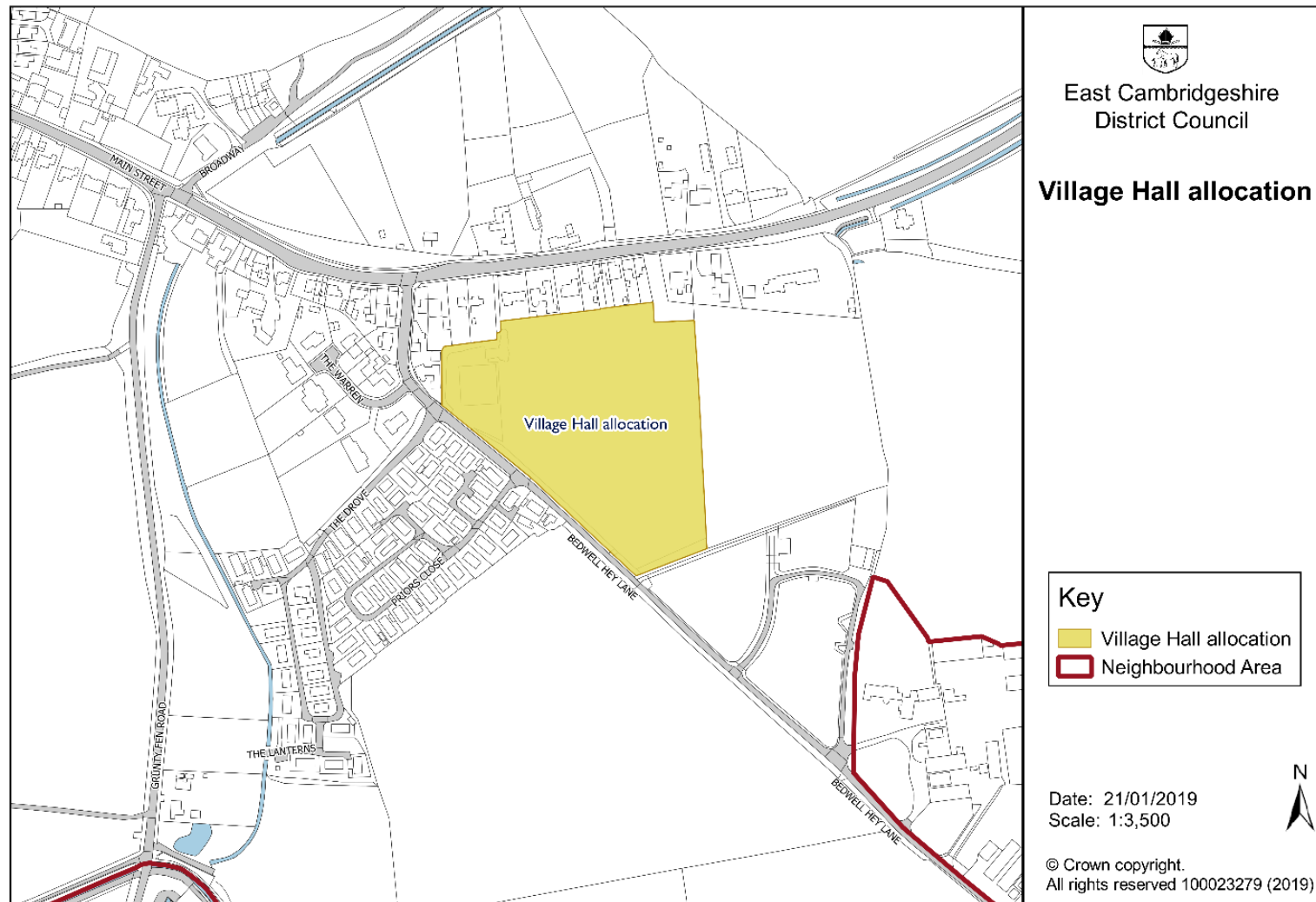
To allow for the redevelopment of the village hall during the plan period in order to create extra car parking space and better access for all users. To move the current changing rooms away from the village hall, to enable new office space to be built, extra meeting room space, and improved internal and external facilities. To enable extra land to be purchased and used to create extra playing areas.

#### 5.7.5 Context and reasoned justification

Current usage of the hall is concentrated at evenings and weekends. It would benefit the community to create a hall which offers more to daytime users like businesses, schools, local childminder groups and the retired to use. Increasing the parking within the grounds will stop the disturbance to local Bedwell Hey Lane residents and secure the safety of users around the entrance.

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 showed the following support for measures to redevelop the village hall:

	Strongly Agree %	Slightly Agree %
The village hall should be redeveloped.	40.05	39.30



Policy Map 12: Village Hall Allocation

**Policy WNP IC3 Protection of Witchford's Community Facilities**

Development proposals should not prejudice the retention of the village pub and post office/shop; rather they should help them prosper, for example through safeguarding associated parking, village centre street scene improvements, or through development of complementary uses that will generate additional footfall.

**5.7.6 Intent**

The Neighbourhood Plan supports the continued provision of the village shop and pub. Development proposals which will help them thrive will be supported and proposals which undermine or threaten their ability to operate will be resisted.

**5.7.7 Context and Reasoned Justification**

The proximity of Witchford to Ely means that residents will continue to travel to Ely for the purpose of accessing many community facilities including dentist, doctors and shops. However, the continued provision of a shop, post office and a pub is considered as essential to allow villagers to access vital community facilities without needing to leave the village, and to help maintain a lively daytime community within the village.

All customers at the village shop are important to maintaining a viable business. A proportion of people using the village shop will travel by car and the off-street parking provision to the side of the shop off Victoria Green allows customers to park up easily. This parking amenity is regarded as a complementary use to the shop.

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 showed the following support for measures to protect existing village facilities:

	Strongly Agree %	Slightly Agree %
Businesses that are important for the community (e.g. post office/garage) should be protected from a change of use to residential development whilst those businesses remain economically viable.	88.75	6.11

#### **WNP IC4 - Flooding**

All development proposals involving new build and situated within those areas in the parish at risk from surface water flooding (as documented in the most up to date Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Surface Water Management Plan) shall be accompanied by a site-specific flood risk assessment.

Such development proposals shall:

- be accompanied by a Surface Water Drainage Strategy;
- ensure all surface water is appropriately managed through the use of sustainable drainage systems and include detailed proposals for future maintenance of these; and
- be designed and constructed to reduce the overall level of surface flood risk to the use of the site and elsewhere when compared to the current use;

For all locations, Sustainable Drainage Systems are the preferred method of surface water disposal and should be incorporated unless demonstrably unfeasible to do so. Systems that benefit Witchford's biodiversity and wildlife will be preferred over systems that do not.

#### **5.7.8 Intent**

This policy is focused on addressing surface water flood risk as opposed to fluvial flood (from rivers) and sea risk. National and local planning policy is considered to adequately address the risks associated from fluvial water flood risk. For example, all residential developments of 10 or more dwellings are required to provide a site-specific flood risk assessment regardless of their flood zone. This policy is intended to complement East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Policy ENV8 Flood Risk.

Areas of the parish do have specific issues when it comes to surface water flooding and the intention behind this policy is to flag this up as an important policy consideration. New development coming forward in the parish should not lead to additional surface water flooding in the parish and opportunities to reduce overall flood risk in the parish should be realised.

#### **5.7.9 Context and reasoned justification**

Parts of the parish, including parts of Witchford village, fall within fluvial flood zone 3. The adopted Local Plan includes policies on development which may impact on fluvial flooding and it is not necessary to include a similar policy in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, parts of the built-up area of the village as well as land adjacent to the village fall within areas that are also susceptible to surface water flooding.

As the Lead Local Flood Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council is responsible for the managing of surface water flooding across the district. In 2014, the County Council commissioned an update to the 2014 county-wide Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP). The SWMP looks in detail at surface water flood events across the district during the period 2011 to 2014 and establishes flood management priorities for the future through reference to the Environment Agency maps which inform the County Council's work in this respect. This risk of surface water flooding should be recognised and development proposals coming forward on affected land should seek to reduce overall risk of surface water flooding to new development as well as properties adjacent or close to the site. The Neighbourhood Plan supports the provision of Sustainable Drainage Systems as detailed in the *Sustainable Drainage Systems explanatory note* April 2019 listed in Appendix 1.



East Cambridgeshire District Council have prepared a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) which looks at both fluvial and surface water flood risk for the purpose of informing planning policy in the district. Appendix D to the SFRA report provides maps of the district showing extent of surface water flood risk. Figs. 8 and 9 below are extracts from this document and illustrate well the level of surface water flooding in and around Witchford village.

Fig. 8: Extract from Appendix D of East Cambridgeshire District Council SFRA showing the western extent of Witchford village.

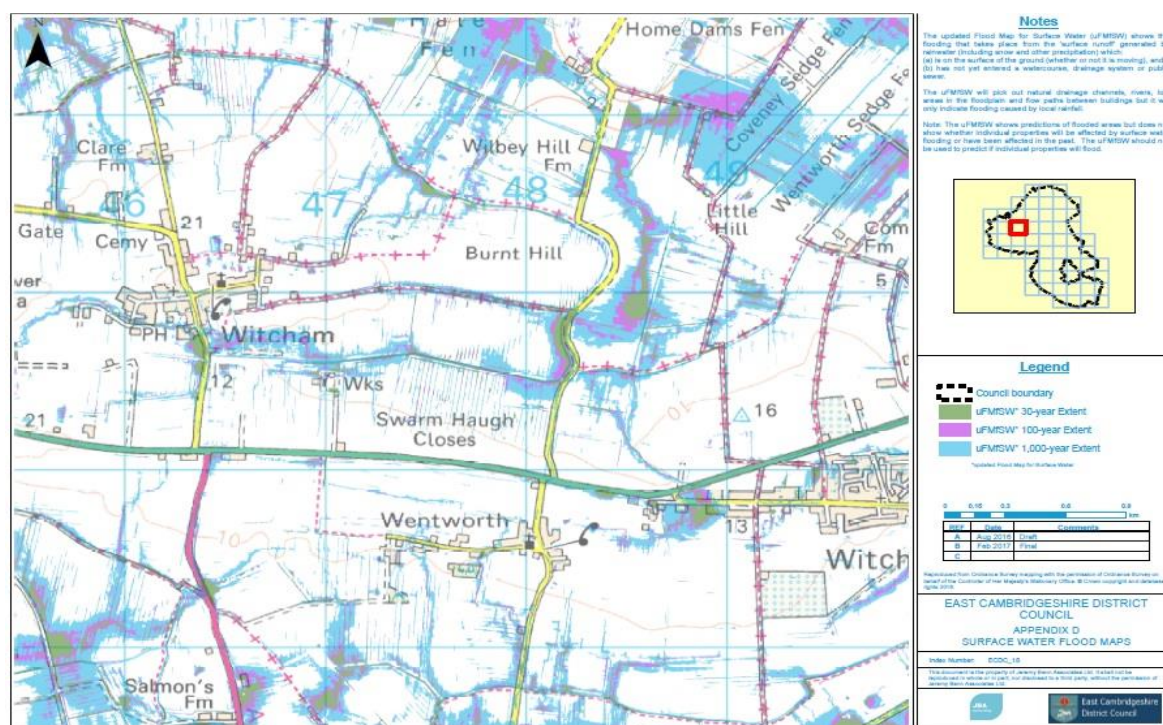
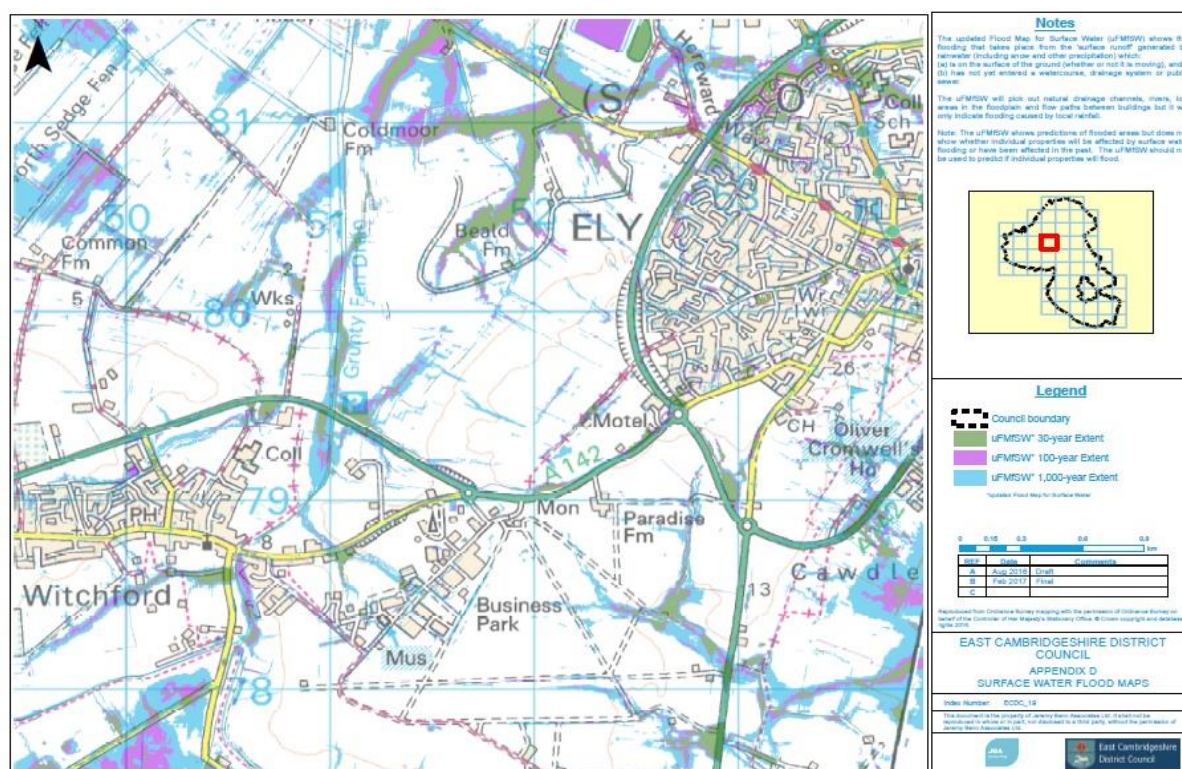


Fig. 9: Extract from Appendix D of East Cambridgeshire District Council SFRA showing the eastern extent of Witchford village.



## 5.8 Village Traffic Policies

The objective for traffic management in Witchford within the parish in the Plan period is:

**'To address issues relating to the speed and volume of traffic through the village, and create attractive and usable opportunities for pedestrian and cycle access within Witchford with the aim of reducing in-village car use**

### **Policy WNP T1 – Getting around the village**

Development proposals which help to create a more walkable neighbourhood in the village will be supported. There should be good permeability through housing areas ensuring they are well connected via walking and cycling routes to neighbouring plots, key services including Witchford Village College, Witchford Primary School and shops and services located on Main Street.

Opportunities will be sought through development proposals to:

- improve existing pavements serving the development to make them more accessible for all users including children and the disabled;
- allow for pedestrian and cycle connectivity to neighbouring plots fitting in with existing connections on developed plots and allowing for future connections to undeveloped plots;
- implement the pedestrian and cycle spine route stretching from Sutton Road to Marroway Lane, Marroway Lane to Common Road, from Common Road to Witchford Village College and from Witchford Village College to Lancaster Way; and
- implement local transport improvements related to and necessary for the development as required by the Parish Council in its Local Transport Plan.

In all Major Development where necessary to achieve a good quality and accessible walking and cycling environment to meet the needs of the users of the development and where directly, fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development, contributions towards these initiatives will be sought.

### 5.8.1 Intent

To ensure all new development designs in good pedestrian and cycle connectivity so that people are encouraged and able to make village journeys by foot or bicycle instead of the car.

### 5.8.2 Context and reasoned justification

Pedestrians and cyclists need to be given more priority within the street scene through the installation and improvement of footpaths and cycle routes. The WLA notes that some of the modern housing developments in Witchford are poorly connected with one another reducing permeability. One of the five development guidelines presented in the report is to *Seek always to ensure permeability through new housing areas, connecting any new development into the heart of the existing settlement.*

Pavements within the village require improvements to make them more accessible for all users, including children and the disabled, helping to meet the sustainability aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan vision and objectives. Crossing points at key locations within the village would provide safer routes for residents – particularly the young and the

elderly. Funding and delivery of public realm improvements will be achieved by using contributions from new developments within the Parish as well as utilising other funding streams.

Residents within Witchford are impacted negatively by speeding cars passing regularly through the village. New development will undoubtedly increase traffic flows / congestion through the parish. As such this policy seeks to obtain appropriate contributions towards the delivery of these works where it can be demonstrated this is required. Care must also be taken to ensure that appropriate measures are introduced that do not 'urbanise' the village.

Data from Automated Traffic Counts commissioned by Witchford Parish Council in November 2016 and from regular Speedwatch sessions underpins this policy, as well as regular anecdotal instances raised on the village Facebook page. Appendix 1 contains more information about the evidence base for this policy.

Witchford Parish Council has developed an initiative for the planning and delivery of a west-east Witchford Pedestrian and Cycle Spine Route. The spine route stretches from the north west fringe of residential areas through existing and proposed residential areas, via Witchford Village College and finally to the Lancaster way roundabout to link up with the A142. In recognition of the daily traffic congestion issues experienced by residents and visitors, its aim is to provide a safe route segregated from traffic for pedestrians and people on bikes and mobility scooters.

The results of the Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 demonstrated that there is overwhelming support among Witchford residents for measures to provide alternative means for travelling around the village, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree %
Provide an improved network of paths linking existing and new residential areas with village facilities	63.03	30.27

Traffic issues featured strongly in the feedback from community consultations throughout the Plan development period, and a report detailing this is included in Appendix 1 as part of the evidence underpinning this policy.

The Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 showed the following support for measures to address traffic problems in the village:

	Strongly Agree %	Slightly Agree %
Make Main Street safer and less attractive for through traffic.	77.64	13.76



## 5.9 **Witchford and Ely Connectivity Policies**

The objective for connectivity in the Plan period is:

**'To support proposals to improve infrastructure for safe and easy travel by cycle, on foot and by public transport to Ely and to Ely train station.'**

### **Policy WNP C1 – Connecting Witchford and Ely through sustainable and safe cycle and pedestrian routes**

The creation of a sustainable and safe segregated cycle and pedestrian route towards Ely within the Neighbourhood Area is strongly encouraged. It should feature as part of any future upgrade to the A142 highway network.

Where necessary to deliver sustainable development and where directly, fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development, off-site contributions will be secured to achieve the pedestrian and cycle route from Witchford towards Ely.

#### 5.9.1 **Intent**

The current highway network presents a difficult obstacle for those wishing to access Ely city centre, train station or Ely Leisure Village by foot or cycle. The Neighbourhood Plan seeks contributions to be secured towards infrastructure solutions which help to address this connectivity barrier between Ely and Witchford.

#### 5.9.2 **Context and reasoned justification**

The provision of a safe cycle and pedestrian route between Witchford and Ely has long been an aspiration of the Parish Council and as development increases the need for a safe sustainable transport route increases. The Neighbourhood Plan and developments within Witchford can contribute to the delivery of this route and policy WNP C1 seeks to achieve that.

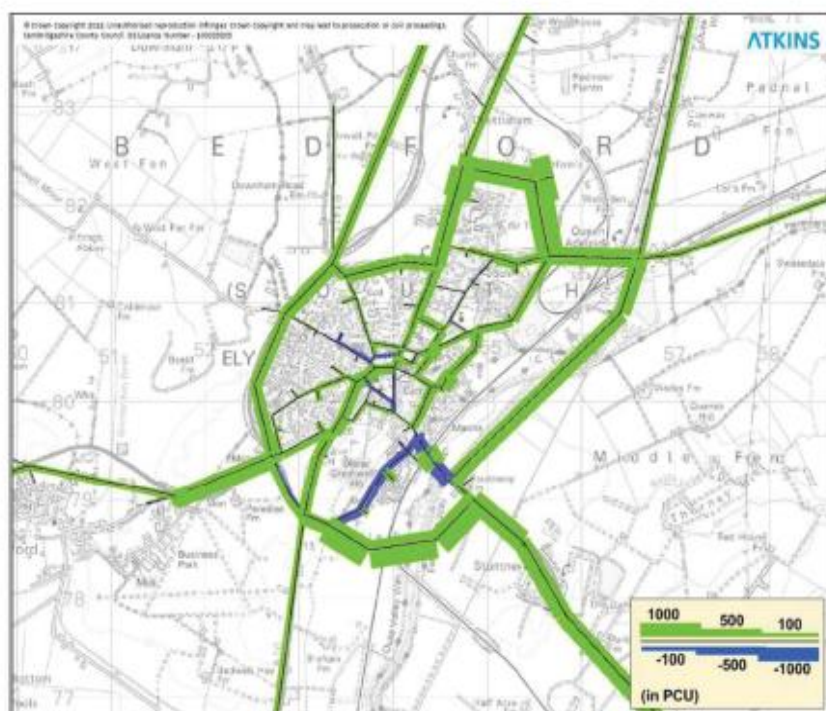
The A10 and its junction with the A142 Witchford Road is an obstacle in realising a safe route and a segregated crossing point over the A10 would be the preferred solution. Indeed the Parish Council has a policy supporting the provision of a bridge over the A10 into Ely from Witchford 'as it not only meets all the objectives but also provides a truly attractive and usable route which we feel will encourage more journeys via sustainable modes of transport'.

This crossing point does not fall within the Witchford Neighbourhood Area and as such the Neighbourhood Plan cannot directly make proposals in respect of such a crossing. However as this is a key project in delivering safe and sustainable transport routes serving the Witchford area the Parish Council includes this as one of the 'Projects' aimed at delivering the vision and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan set out in Appendix 2.

The Parish Council will work with Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council and the City of Ely Council to ensure development proposals within Witchford contribute to the provision of a safe and segregated sustainable transport route towards Ely.



Fig. 10 Projected increases in traffic flows 2011 – 2031. Source Transport Strategy for East Cambridgeshire



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Figure 4: Changes in highway link flows in the morning peak between 2011 and 2031. Source: East Cambridgeshire Local Plan Transport Test (October 2012).

## 5.10 Supporting Witchford's Micro-economy Policies

The objective for sustainable economic development within the parish in the Plan period is:

**'To support existing local businesses and to encourage increased economic activity appropriate to the rural nature of the parish'.**

### **Policy WNP E1 – Support for small business development**

Development proposals that help to encourage and support small businesses in the village will be viewed favourably where they are consistent with other priorities in this plan and where they do not trigger or contribute to problems associated with on-street parking. This could include:

- housing design that facilitates home working; and
- new accommodation, including serviced offices, that is suitable for micro businesses

#### 5.10.1 Intent

The focus of this policy is not business development at existing employment areas, such as the Sedgeway Business Park, but is intended to apply to proposals in the village. The policy aims to contribute to sustainable development by:

- encouraging the development of local jobs and reduce outward commuting.
- encouraging the retention and expansion of local service businesses to meet local needs and helping the village centre to thrive.

#### 5.10.2 Context and reasoned justification

The evidence from the Demographic and Socio-Economic Review undertaken to inform this Neighbourhood Plan and the database of Witchford based businesses compiled during the Plan process demonstrate that there is a healthy micro-economy of small-scale employment in Witchford, which this policy seeks to encourage and reinforce. Whilst the largest employment sectors in Witchford are education and 'administrative & support service activities', with Witchford Village College, the Rackham Primary School and Pre-school being major employers, the business database includes a significant proportion of small and home-based businesses.

Increasing Witchford based employment will help to reduce the projected increase in traffic volume on the A142 and A10 (see Fig.10) and will help the village retain a sense of community and daytime vitality, in line with the overall Vision for this Plan to 'protect the rural character and community spirit of Witchford'.

The Neighbourhood Plan household questionnaire of February 2018 demonstrated that there is overwhelming support among Witchford residents for measures that promote working from home, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree %
Policies that promote working from home should be supported.	58.27	34.81

The questionnaire also demonstrated support among Witchford residents for new accommodation that is suitable for micro-businesses, as follows:

Question	Strongly agree %	Slightly agree %
Dedicated space for networking, workspace and business development is needed.	26.07	44.11

A survey of Witchford-based businesses was carried out in July 2018. A small majority favoured the provision of more office space and flexi-working space in Witchford.

#### **Policy WNP E2 – Employment and Commercial Development**

Development proposals for employment and business uses at the Sedgeway Business Park within the allocated area WFD E1 shown in Map 13 will be supported where they protect and utilise opportunities to reinforce landscape character. Proposals should have regard to the landscape guidance notes for the Common Side Local Landscape Character Area as provided in the Witchford Landscape Appraisal.

##### **5.10.3 Intent**

To ensure commercial development conserves and where possible reinforces landscape character in Witchford Parish

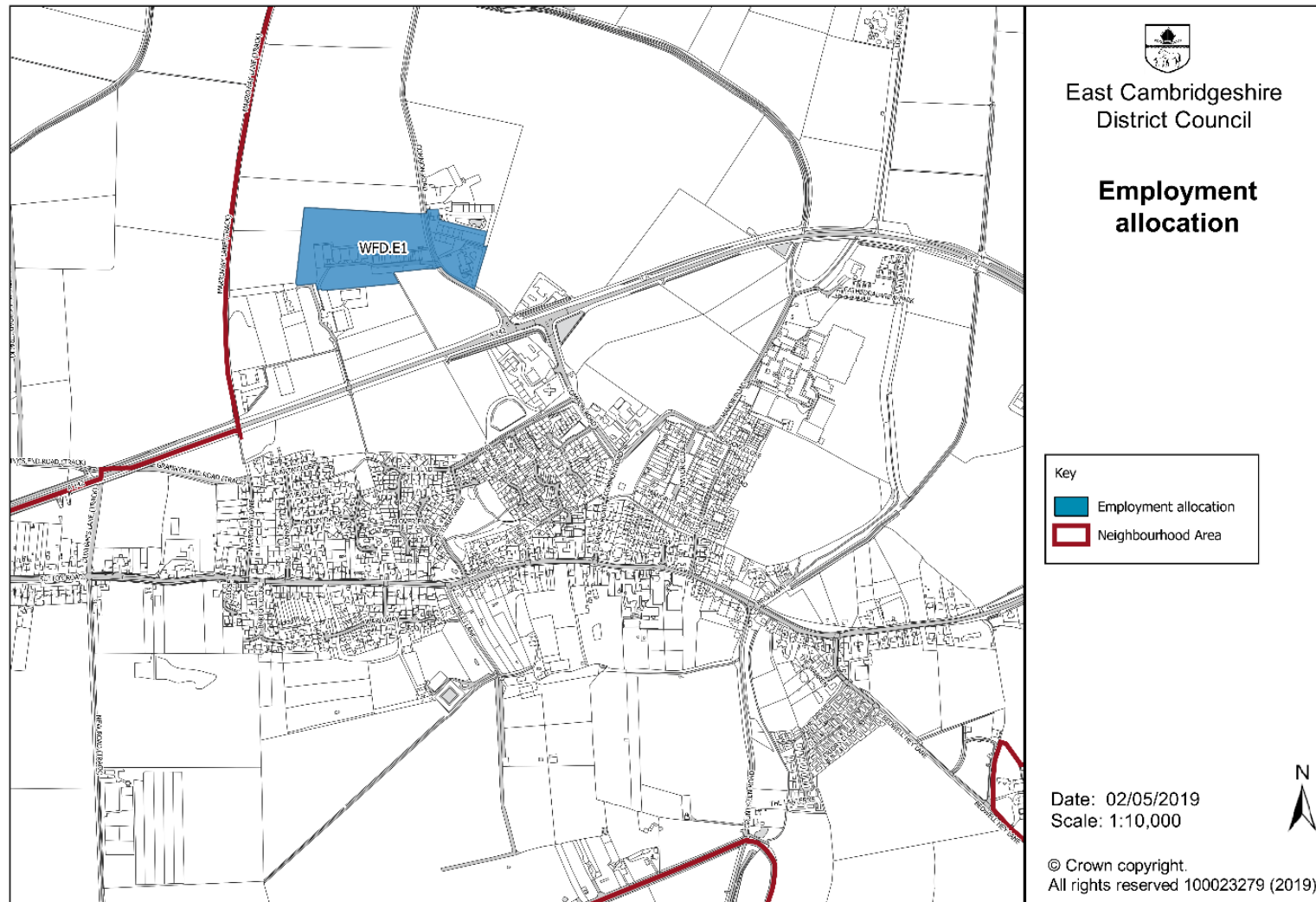
##### **5.10.4 Context and reasoned justification**

There is one key area of employment development in the Neighbourhood Plan area; the Sedgeway Business Park north of the A142. This falls in the Common Side Local Landscape Character Area. The WLA states there is limited scope for additional commercial development associated with the existing business parks due to visual sensitivity of the north facing slopes. The WLA provides the following guidance for commercial development:

- ensure new commercial development delivers new hedgerows/tree planting to build up overlapping lines of vegetation on the northern slopes, filtering views to development associated with existing business parks and reinforcing the distinction between island and wider fen.
- seek removal of non-native planting around business parks and replace with native woodland

The Lancaster Way Business Park is a designated Enterprise Zone outside of the Plan area. The WLA describes the Isle of Ely local landscape character area which covers the Lancaster Way Business Park as well as the south eastern part of the Plan area. The WLA states that there is little/no further opportunity for development but does provide guidance for the ongoing development of the Enterprise Zone.

The Witchford Neighbourhood Plan policies do not apply to proposals outside the Plan area but Witchford Parish Council will seek to secure the above guidelines into proposals at the Lancaster Way Business Park.



Policy Map 13: Employment Allocation

## 6. Projects

- 6.1 A number of projects have been directly derived from the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaires, which invited respondents to comment and highlight issues that particularly concerned them.
- 6.2 These projects are not directly related to the development and use of land therefore cannot form part of the Neighbourhood Plan, but complement the planning policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. They will help achieve the overarching Vision of the Plan:

**'To value and protect the rural character and community spirit of Witchford, ensuring that future development meets local needs'**

- 6.3 The list of projects is set out at Appendix 2 at the end of the Plan.
- 6. The Parish Council will liaise with the County Council, the primary school, stakeholders, landowners and the wider community with regard to future primary and secondary school provision in the plan area. Once it becomes apparent that additional land for new facilities will be required the Parish Council will look to safeguard sites (as part of a revised Neighbourhood Plan) for future provision. Possible sites for future safeguarding include those shown on 'Areas of Search for Possible Future Education Infrastructure', a map submitted alongside this Neighbourhood Plan. Education provision will be considered at the first review of the Neighbourhood Plan.

## 7. Monitoring and Review

Witchford Parish Council will have responsibility for providing the leadership for the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council will closely monitor new development through the planning process to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan policies are adhered to. Each Annual Meeting of the Parish Council after the Plan's implementation will include a detailed report on the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan on the previous year, and the likely impact of the Plan for the forthcoming year. The Parish Council website [www.witchfordpc.org](http://www.witchfordpc.org) will carry an up to date report on progress with the Plan during its lifetime. The Parish Council intends to hold four-yearly (one Parish Council term) reviews of the effectiveness of this Neighbourhood Plan, to be carried out by community-based steering groups. These will hold the Parish Council to account for their stewardship of the Neighbourhood Plan, and will consider if there is any need to review or amend the Plan.



## Appendix 1

### Documentary evidence used in the production of Witchford Neighbourhood Plan

Copies of the documents or the relevant weblinks are on the Witchford Parish Council website [www.witchfordpc.org](http://www.witchfordpc.org).

#### 1. General Plan production

*Witchford Demographic, Social and Economic Review* November 2017 CambsACRE  
*East Cambridgeshire Local Plan* April 2015 East Cambridgeshire District Council  
*Neighbourhood Plan SWOT analysis* November 2017 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Witchford Village Plan* 2008 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Village Vision Consultation Responses* July 2011 East Cambridgeshire District Council  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* November 2016 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on first village questionnaire* January 2017 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on Neighbourhood Plan drop-in session* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Witchford Landscape Character Assessment* December 2018 Alison Farmer Associates

#### 2. Landscape and Character

*Witchford Landscape Character Assessment* December 2018 Alison Farmer Associates  
*National Character Area Profile No46: The Fens* Natural England  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Supporting Evidence Paper for Policy WNP LC2 Witchford Area of Separation* September 2019 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

#### 3. Green Infrastructure

*Witchford Landscape Appraisal* December 2018 Alison Farmer Associates  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*CPERC database* CPERC  
*Definitive Map of public rights of way* Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Database of Witchford green infrastructure* July 2018 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Walks leaflet* Witchford Parish Council  
*List of Tree Protection Orders for Witchford* East Cambridgeshire District Council  
*Witchford Local Green Space Report* May 2019 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Local Green Space questionnaires* August 2018 Witchford Parish Council  
*Summary of Witchford Green Spaces Facebook Posts*  
*Witchford Local Greenspace: Supporting Information* Open Spaces Group October 2018

#### 4. Housing

*Witchford Demographic, Social and Economic Review* November 2017 CambsACRE  
*Ely Estate Agents Survey* October 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Building for Life* 12 January 2015 Design Council  
*A New Way to Build* Open Spaces Group April 2017  
*Housing for People and Wildlife* January 2018 Wildlife Trusts  
*Sustainable Drainage Systems explanatory note* April 2019  
*Witchford Housing Standards Evidence Report* East Cambridgeshire District Council September 2019

#### 5. Infrastructure

*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Community Facilities Audit* May 2013 East Cambridgeshire District Council  
*Play Areas Audit* 2013 East Cambridgeshire District Council  
*0-19 Education Organisation Plan 2018-2019* Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Cambridgeshire County Council response to planning application for land at 27-39 Sutton Road (19/00966/OUM)* July 2019  
<https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>

#### 6. Traffic

*East Cambridgeshire Local Transport Strategy* December 2016 Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan 3* July 2014 Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Witchford Parish Council Transport Plan* September 2018 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Pedestrian and Cycle Spine Route Policy* January 2019 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Automatic Traffic Count data* November 2016 Witchford Parish Council  
*Witchford Village College Travel Plan* March 2017 Witchford Village College  
*Speedwatch Data 2017 – 2019* Witchford Parish Council  
*Local Highways Improvement Fund supporting evidence 2017-2018* Witchford Parish Council  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Witchford Landscape Character Assessment* December 2018 Alison Farmer Associates

#### 7. Connectivity

*A10 Pedestrian and Cycle Crossing Policy* January 2019 Witchford Parish Council  
*East Cambridgeshire Local Transport Strategy* December 2016 Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan 3* July 2014 Cambridgeshire County Council  
*Ely Masterplan* 2010 East Cambridgeshire District Council

#### 8. Supporting Witchford's Micro Economy

*Witchford Demographic, Social and Economic Review* November 2017 CambsACRE  
*Database of Witchford businesses* June 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Witchford business questionnaire* July 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire* February 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group  
*Report on second village questionnaire* March 2018 Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

## Appendix 2

### Complementary Projects List

#### CIL Funded Project List.

There are a range of community amenities and projects that are identified which can be wholly or partly funded by CIL contributions to the Parish. These are outlined below.

- Village environment, e.g. flower displays, seating on footpaths, litter bins. Suggestion for a community garden will be brought to the Parish Council for consideration whether to add to CIL123 projects list.
- Community facilities e.g. Village Christmas tree, coffee club (assist with capital costs), youth club (assist with capital costs), non-land-use related improvements to village hall
- Play facilities e.g. skate park, wild play spaces, village trim-trail, orienteering course, football/basketball cage
- Small scale highways works such as bollards and signage to improve safety at rights of way crossings on A142

#### Other Schemes

Other schemes not deliverable by Witchford Parish Council but which the Parish Council will support or lobby for:

- To improve General Practitioner facilities in the Parish.
- To improve broadband and mobile phone network coverage in the area through proactive discussions with existing and potential operators.
- To improve public transport provision in Witchford.
- Improvements to public rights of way crossings over A142.
- Improved crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists at the A10/A142 junction.