

GREAT DUNMOW – May 2007

Introduction

Great Dunmow is the focal point of the south eastern part of the District and the second largest settlement in the District. It has a wide range of services and because of this, has been picked out by the development industry as an area capable of accommodating significant additional housing growth. As such, it is therefore particularly important to assess the environmental sensitivity and capacity of Great Dunmow so as to understand the extent to which the town might be able to accommodate such development.

General character.

Great Dunmow is in close strategic proximity to the national motorway network, being linked with the M11 and Stansted Airport in the west by the A120 dual carriageway. The town is also well located in relation to larger local centres by excellent road links with Braintree in the east and Bishop's Stortford in the west. Saffron Walden to the north and the county town of Chelmsford to the south are also easily accessible by roads of lesser capacity.

The influence of Stansted Airport has recently exerted significant economic, housing and transportation influences as demonstrated by the large housing developments in the town over the last 20 years. Additionally the opening of the new A120 is beginning to affecting commercial investment decisions in its corridor at several locations, notably at Braintree. Great Dunmow is now an expanding commuter town with reasonable employment, service and educational facilities. The population is currently about 7,000 but will rise to about 10,000 when the committed development at Woodlands Park has been completed.

The main part of the town is located on a spur to the south west of the valley of the river Chelmer and the main road, the High Street, lies along the ridge from which the Market Place, an important focal point leads away to the Causeway and meadows along the river. Church End is separated from the main town and lies in the valley. There are two separate pockets of modern development along St Edmunds Lane, namely St Edmunds Fields and Riverside. Modern development at St Edmunds Fields joins Church End. The latter is separated from Riverside and from the main part of the town by the extensive open land that forms the Chelmer Valley. Some of this land is owned by the Town Council who maintain it as a countryside park, actively used by the general public. Together with adjoining paddocks, pasture land and other open land in private ownership, this particular tract of countryside in close proximity to the built up areas, is an essential landscape component that adds significantly to the environmental quality of the town.

The Causeway leads to Beaumont Hill, which then rises to Parsonage Downs, a pleasant historic open space surrounded by trees where the comprehensive school and leisure centre are situated.

The town is currently expanding particularly in a north westerly direction where facilities, including a large shopping store and school off Stortford Road, have been provided.

Some pockets of farmland abutting the built up area, particularly in the valley, are classified as grade 3. However elsewhere, the agricultural land around Great Dunmow is generally of good and versatile quality and is designated grade 2.

Interesting archaeological sites have been identified in the past but no extensive areas of land are believed to exist where development would be inappropriate for archaeological reasons alone. The historical and archaeological background is set out in the Great Dunmow Conservation Area Appraisal document.

The A120 dual carriageway road skirts the town to the south and encloses an area in the south east that is designated for new businesses and a civic amenity site and depot. A new police station is currently under construction and a travel lodge has recently been completed. Within this general industrial zone there are several employment areas.

The central part of the historic core described below, is surrounded and isolated by modern earlier, mid and late 20th century residential developments on all sides. These housing areas are generally neutral in character and neither seriously erode or add to the quality of the historic core.

The historic core and its relationship with the built up area of the town as a whole.

The existing conservation area has recently been appraised and its extent as now defined is an accurate definition of the historic core. There are about 265 individually listed buildings in the extensive parish of Great Dunmow of which about 170 are in the designated conservation area. Of the latter, the majority (about 34%) are from the 19th century. There are about 10% from the 18th century whilst the 17th century is well represented with about 26%. There are about 19% from the 16th century and 6% from the 15th century. The remainder are from the 14th century and earlier.

Throughout the conservation area there are trees in abundance and these make a significant contribution to the quality of the townscape. There are quality areas of open space both owned by the parish and also in private ownership. Such latter areas where development would diminish the sense of place are identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal.

Expressed in percentage terms the historic core defined by the conservation area represents about 17% of the built up part of the town.

The historic core consists of four distinct areas, firstly, the High Street and central area of the town, secondly, Parsonage Downs including the Causeway, thirdly, Church End and fourthly, Threader's Green.

Central area. The central area of the town is a pleasant combination of curving streets, gradients, buildings of good proportions, juxtaposition of materials and roofscapes, mature trees, open spaces and water features. The central area of the town contains the shopping facilities that offer a wide variety of retail activities. The commercial facilities are frequently housed in buildings that are of considerable age with shop fronts having been added during the 19th century. There are two focal points, one at the junction of High Street with New Street where the War Memorial is located and the other at its junction with Stortford Road and the Market Place. Market Place falls sharply away from the High Street and this sudden change of level associated with the curvature and narrowness of the street adds significantly to the character and variety of the town centre. Where Market Place joins North Street, Doctor's Pond and the extensive area of open space known as The Downs comes into view. This extensive open space with its changing levels, mature trees and water feature makes an exceptionally important environmental contribution to Great Dunmow's historic central core.

In summary the central historic core is of high environmental quality with a wide range of listed buildings of varying ages and styles and extensive quality open space. It is surrounded and generally visually isolated from the approach roads and outskirts of the town by modern 20th century residential developments. The latter are generally neutral in character and neither seriously erode or add to the quality of its historic qualities.

Parsonage Downs. Parsonage Downs is an extensive green that forms the northernmost part of the Great Dunmow conservation area. The dozen or so listed properties, some with tiled roofs, others thatched, add to its visual and historic importance. Parsonage Downs is treed in parts and there are several ponds that add to the visual and ecological importance of the area. The large complex to the west consisting of the Helena Romanes school and the Leisure centre does not visually intrude to a significant degree from many vantage points although the rural characteristics of the area are affected at school pick up and drop off times by the presence of large numbers of buses and private vehicles. To the immediate east the extensive open countryside slopes down to the Chelmer valley. To the north there is woodland, beyond which is open rising countryside beyond a strong landscape feature consisting of an extensive and continuous tree line that is prominent in this location, beyond which a roundabout for the north west bypass has been constructed.

Beaumont Hill (named after Sir George Beaumont, amateur painter and important patron of the arts, whose commemorative plaque is attached to the grade 1 listed Clock House, (formerly Gostern Lodge) joins Parsonage Downs with The Causeway, effectively linking town and countryside.

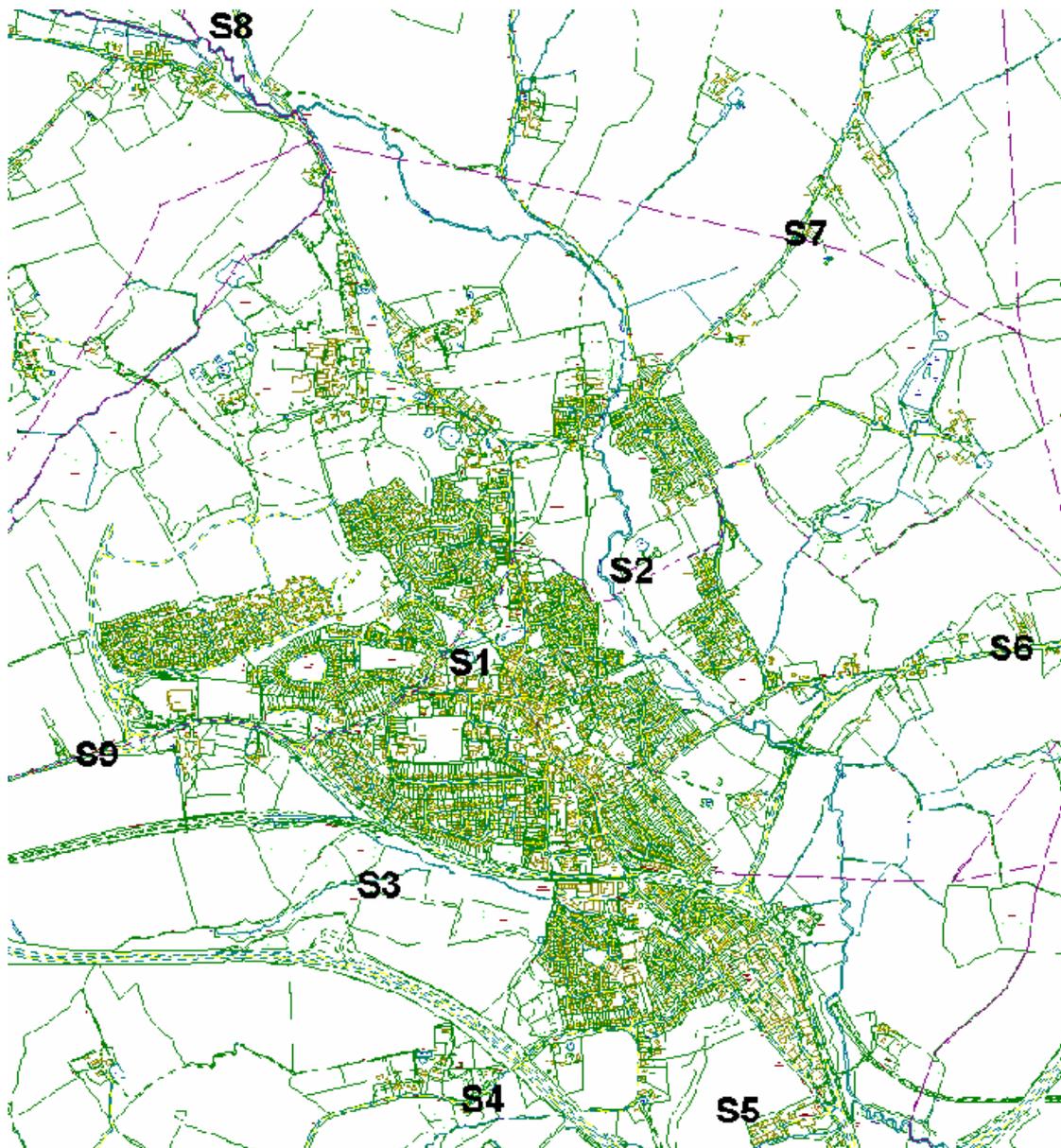
In summary and in relation to the rest of the town, Parsonage Downs is set in open arable countryside for the most part and this openness is very much part of its visual attraction and character.

Church End. Church End is dominated by the church, a magnificent structure dating from the 13th century. It has an early 14th century chancel and a 15th century south porch, and was heavily restored in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The church is a very important landmark building dominating the landscape from many local vantage points. Its magnificent graveyard and mature trees is a significant environmental asset. The historic interdependence of the area is demonstrated by looking at the 1877 Ordnance Survey map that denotes the presence of two pubs, a school, a smithy and extensive allotments in addition to the Church and Vicarage. The south eastern flank has been compromised by the construction of local authority housing in the 20th century. There is a narrow gap of farmland between Beaumont Hill and Church End which performs an important visual function in separating Church End from the main part of the town thus retaining its separate visual and historic characteristics.

In summary the fine visual and historical qualities of Church End, although not enhanced by the 20th century development of St Edmunds Fields, is characterised by its setting in the open countryside and its separation from the rest of the town. Particularly important in this respect is the narrow band of countryside traversed by Lime Tree Hill from which the landmark building of St Mary's church dominates the local scene.

Threader's Green. Threader's Green defines the western extent of the conservation area and together with the open space to the northwest, is a small but important scattering of thatched properties and open space, extensively used as pedestrian access to the school and supermarket to the west.

The quality and general function of landscapes in and adjacent to the town by sector and a broad statement as to the effect of development in each sector.



Map of Great Dunmow showing the sectors

Sector 1. The Downs.

Quality of Landscape. The extensive area of open space in the centre of the town is an open space maintained by the Town Council and of the highest quality. Its key components include water features of different types and a wide range of tree species and open spaces with different characteristics and levels. It is framed by a built environment of historic quality and variety. The manner in which it is laid out represents a series of interconnected greens each with different characteristics.

General function of Landscape. Much of the area is extensively used by the general public for walking and other recreational purposes such as fishing. It is a very important green lung right in the heart of the historic town that supports an extensive ecology including birds, wild flowers and amphibians. It is of great visual importance in setting off elements of the historic built environment.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development would very seriously and detrimentally affect the historic built form that frames the Downs. Development would result in a serious ecological loss and loss of an open space extensively used by the local population and visitors alike. In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 1 Doctors pond and The Downs

Sector 2. Land in the Chelmer Valley.

Quality of Landscape. Open grassland rises gently from the river to the crisply defined urban edge of the town to the west and more steeply to Riverside and St Edmunds Fields in the east. Much is land owned and maintained by the Town Council. There is other land in private ownership, some of which is pasture. To the north arable farmland forms a sharp edge with Church end. The quality of the landscape is high in so far as the topography is varied; there is extensive tree cover with a wide range of mature species, an interesting and varied watercourse and extensive and varied views of the town and some of its important historic buildings.

General function of Landscape. Much of the area is extensively used by the general public for walking and other general recreational purposes. The open nature of the land performs a particularly important function in separating the main built up area from Church End and St. Edmunds Fields and from Riverside and also separates the latter built up areas from each other. Its general open nature provides views and glimpses of two important landmark buildings, principally the tower of St Mary's church and to a lesser extent, the

tower of the former windmill. The narrow open gap of arable farmland at Lime tree Hill is important in setting off historic buildings of quality that define part of the edge of Church End. A public footpath links Church End to the Braintree Road and the open countryside beyond.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development to the west of Church End at Lime Tree Hill would detrimentally affect the historic edge of the settlement in this location and views of St Mary's church, the key historic landmark building.

Elsewhere, the general effect of built form in Sector 2 land would to bring additional urbanisation into a very attractive valley landscape in closer proximity with a peaceful green lung of a well developed and actively used recreational facility. The loss of open land, nearly all of which performs a valuable function of maintaining the separate identity of the three existing built up areas would be most unfortunate. Additionally and dependant on exact location of development, other views of landmark buildings could be affected. In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 2 Land in the Chelmer Valley looking north-east towards Church End.

Sector 3. Land between the inner bypass and the A120 road.

Quality of landscape. This extensive area of land is characterised by its varied topography and rich diversity of landscape characteristics. Viewed from the A120 rest area there are glimpses of the town in the distance across open farmland interspersed with tree cover woodlands and spinney's that are extensive in some locations. The inner bypass, built on the line of the former railway is characterised by dense tree and scrub cover that successfully shields development along its alignment. Within this large area there is flat arable land in some locations and smaller parcels of arable and pasture set in a gently undulating terrain with extensive hedge and tree cover in other places. The easternmost flank adjacent to the existing built up area at Lukin's Mead consists of a rich diversity of a valley brook water feature, grassland, coppiced woodland with diversity in flora and fauna and dense scrubland. It is used by local residents for walking although designated footpath links are limited.

General function of landscape. It is an ecological corridor hemmed in by two major roads that provides a diverse and ecologically rich landscape close to the town and one that is publicly accessible in part.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development on sector 3 land would not visually impact on the historic core, the nearest part of which is the southern end of New Street. The principal effect of large scale development in this location would be the urbanisation and consequent loss of a diverse natural landscape with a rich and varied ecology. Additionally and unless extensive landscaping were undertaken some development would inevitably be visible from the A120 extending built form into what is presently open countryside. In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 3 land between inner bypass and the A120.

Sector 4. Land on the Ongar Road approach, north of the A120.

Quality of landscape. This general approach, whilst being rural in nature, is also characterised by the presence of occasional buildings before the A120 crossing is reached. At this point the A120 is in cutting and because of this its impact on the landscape is minimal. Immediately beyond the new bypass and to the north, there is an area of former parkland with a number of quality individual trees whilst to the south west there is an area of flat open arable countryside hemmed in by the bypass and Clapton Hall Lane

General function of Landscape. The parkland trees, which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders, provide a quality landscape, important in its own right. . Additionally such trees provide a high quality environment for the enjoyment of residents in the adjacent Lukin's Mead development. The open arable farmland with the clear cut and precise urban edge abutting it makes a firm transition point between town and country. Despite being separated by the bypass from the wider countryside beyond, the arable farmland is visually part of the wider landscape because the A120 is in cutting in this location.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development on sector 4 land would not visually impact on the historic core. The principal effect of development in this location would be to extend the urban area onto open arable farmland and onto parkland with the probable consequential loss of fine parkland trees. In broad summary it is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 4 land at Ongar Road looking north east toward parkland landscape.

Sector 5. Land at the south east sector of the town, north of the A120.

Quality of Landscape. The area consists of two late 20th century commercial areas to the north of the A130 with a third and much older one known as Hoblong's industrial estate to the south of this road. Buildings on the latter industrial estate vary in quality but the overall impression is of a very poor environment consisting of external storage and parked cars and substandard access arrangements. A garage to the south also detracts. A Travel Lodge has recently been completed here.

Whilst the later industrial estates to the north of the A130 are better appointed they also vary in design quality and have little overall architectural cohesion and are characterised by parked cars and extensive signage that detract further. The A120 bypass road is elevated and its bulk and associated infrastructure, including roundabouts and signage also detract. The three areas are designated as employment land to be 'safeguarded'.

Immediately to the north of the existing Hoblong's industrial site is a large area of unused land that is designated as a future employment site on which a new police building is currently under construction. To the south of the same existing industrial site is open farmland, part of which is designated for a future civic amenity site and depot. To the east of the A130 and north of the A120 there is an area of unkempt land through which the river Chelmer runs.

The only features of environmental quality are roadside hedges and planting and the maturing planting that separates the designated employment land from properties at Ongar Road and Clapton Hall Lane. Overall the zone can be properly described as being 'visually impoverished'

General function of Landscape. This overall visually impoverished area with its disjointed and uncoordinated industrial and commercial buildings provides a very poor visual introduction to Great Dunmow, the effect of which is particularly noticeable from the elevated A120 road in this location, a situation unlikely to be improved should the civic amenity and depot site proceed.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development on sector 5 land would not visually impact on the historic core. In broad summary and subject to resolving strategic land use considerations and with associated bold imaginative strokes and the introduction of a co-ordinated architectural master plan, it is considered that development could be introduced into this sector to improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 5 The Hoblongs Industrial Estate

Sector 6. Land on the Braintree Road approach and at St. Edmunds Lane.

Quality of Landscape. The approach to the town along the Braintree Road is one of a broad agricultural landscape on a gradient that descends to the edge of the town with scattered houses and a group of converted commercial buildings (some of which are listed) to the north of the Braintree Road near the junction with St. Edmund's Lane. Within the generally open arable land there is some woodland. As the road, tree lined in places open in other locations curves in a southerly direction, the open grassland parkland setting of Dunmow Park with its specimen parkland trees, protected by Tree Preservation Orders, rises into view and is set against the backcloth of mixed tree cover that forms the horizon in this location.

To the south of St. Edmunds Lane, development at Riverside is separated by a narrow gap of pasture land from St. Edmunds Fields and Church End beyond. From this gap there are long views across the Chelmer valley to the main town beyond. Notwithstanding the presence of these relatively modern and neutral housing developments, St. Edmunds Lane is also characterised by its open and generally rising arable land to the east within which is set the landmark windmill tower, itself a listed building. Several footpaths traverse this sector.

General function of Landscape. The parkland and trees, subject to Tree Preservation Orders, on the rising ground leading into the town at Dunmow

Park provide a distinctive quality parkland landscape on this approach to the town, an important landscape feature in its own right. Elsewhere the large scale open arable farmland is part of the much wider rural landscape that also separates St Edmunds Fields and Riverside from each. From some public viewpoints the landscape sets off the landmark windmill tower.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development on sector 6 land would not have a direct visually impact on the historic core, because of the presence of existing developments surrounding both the main historic core and the smaller historic area at Church End. The principal effect of development in this location would be to extend the urban area onto open elevated arable farmland and elsewhere at Dunmow Park onto an extensive area of quality parkland. Additionally development to both the north and south of St. Edmunds Lane would result in the loss of open land, nearly all of which performs a valuable function of maintaining the separate identity of Riverside and St. Edmunds Fields and in part provides a setting for the landmark windmill tower. In broad summary it is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 6 looking west from Braintree Road towards Dunmow Park.

Sector 7. Land on the Stebbing Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. The approach to the town along the Stebbing Road is one of a very open agricultural arable landscape on a gradient that descends to the edge of the Church End with a scattering of isolated houses on its approach. There is a firm edge to Church End and The Broadway which is heavily treed in places where the distinctive landmark church tower is visible above the tree canopy. Several public footpaths exist.

General function of Landscape. The large arable fields that make a clear distinction between built form and countryside form part of the much wider and extensive agricultural landscape that contains the community in this location.

Broad statement of effect of development. The principal effect of development on Sector 7 land would be to extend urban development onto highly visible and open rising farmland and introduce an extended urban settlement in close proximity to a small community with a separate identity and an historic core characterised by narrow roads where increased traffic would detract from its historic qualities. A large urban extension here would further diminish the separate characteristics of this small discreet community exacerbating detrimental effects already created by the nearby St Edmunds Fields. Dependant on location, development on sector 7 land could detrimentally affect the impact of the landmark tower of St Mary's church from some vantage points. In broad summary it is considered that development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 7 looking west towards Church End from Stebbing Road

Sector 8. Land on the northern approach.

Quality of Landscape. The extensive green of Parsonage Downs with its listed properties is set in extensive open countryside that slopes down to the Chelmer valley in the east. To the north there is woodland and a strong natural tree line beyond which is open unused countryside within which has been constructed the ground works for a future northern bypass. Beyond this is the small community of Little Easton, which although not a designated conservation area is a very pleasant hamlet with a range of quality buildings, some listed. To the west are the playing fields of the Helena Romanes School. Several footpaths and a Bridleway exist in the Chelmer valley.

General function of Landscape. The large open landscape that slopes away to the river forms a clear demarcation with Parsonage Downs and provides a distinct setting for this part of the historic core. The unused open countryside to the south east and northwest of the ground works to the bypass acts as a countryside buffer in the narrow gap that separates Little Easton and the northern end of Parsonage Downs.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development at sector 8 land would visually and detrimentally impact on the historic core of Parsonage Downs which is in immediate proximity. The distinctive relationship of an historic area in a broad rural landscape would be destroyed particularly if development occurred on the slopes of the Chelmer valley. Development in the narrow gap between Parsonage Downs and Little Easton would bring these two communities closer together eroding their separate identities. In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 8 land at the northern approach

Sector 9. Land on the western approach.

Quality of Landscape. This is characterised by a wide open and very flat arable landscape. The clear break between town and country is marked by the Tesco store and the new school beyond. At this point but to the south the landscape at Folly Farm and Staggs Farm is fragmented and much less open within which sits two groups of buildings that are quite prominent in the local landscape. The larger Folly Farm complex of buildings is extensive, many of which are listed. Footpaths, a bridleway and a byway exist.

General function of Landscape. The large flat arable fields that form part of the much wider and extensive agricultural landscape contains the community in this location where there is a clear and distinct break between countryside and built form marked by the Tesco store. The more fragmented landscape around the two building complexes at Folly Farm and Staggs Farm contain these groupings and sets off the large complex of listed buildings at Folly Farm.

Broad statement of effect of development. . Development at sector 9 land to the west of the Tesco store would not visually and detrimentally impact on the historic core of Threader's Green which is located nearby to the east because it is already enveloped for the most part by modern development. Development at Staggs Farm would introduce development in closer proximity to Threader's Green whilst urban development around the listed complex at Folly Farm could detrimentally impact on the large group of listed buildings in this location. In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement.



Sector 9 Staggs Farm



Sector 9 Tesco store

Overall summary.

Sector 5, the area dominated by mixed employment land in the south east quadrant of the town is the only area identified where it is considered coordinated development could improve the sense of place and local distinctiveness. However careful consideration of the allocations in the existing approved plan would be necessary to achieve significant housing numbers.

It is accepted that whilst the quality of new development can be designed to reduce detrimental effect, new development in Sectors 1, 2, 7 and 8 dependent on scale and location, would most likely result in a detrimental impact on the historic core, seriously eroding parts of the Conservation Area and its setting and identity.

In relation to all quadrants, except 5, the conclusion reached is that development would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the settlement for the reasons explained above.