

MARCH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

2015 - 2030

REFERENDUM DOCUMENT



March Town Plan by March Town People



Produced by March Town Council

Foreword

March Town Council, as a qualifying body has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan, which is a statutory land use planning document, carrying significant material weight in the planning process.

We are aware that many residents and businesses in the town have concerns about planning and in response to this we have prepared this Plan to ensure that the views of local people are given sufficient weight in the planning process on matters that are important to them.

The making of this Plan has been community led from the outset and is the product of considerable community engagement work, which started with the town wide survey in November 2013, followed by an issues and options consultation in May 2014, a vision, aims and objectives consultation in October 2014, and a Pre-Submission draft Plan consultation in March 2015, all of which provided a good platform to identify the most important planning issues to you, which in turn has helped to shape the eventual scope and content of the Plan.

The Plan has taken longer to prepare than anticipated and this has been due to the volume of comments we received at the various stages of consultation, which have taken time to carefully consider and find the right solutions. However, the March Neighbourhood Plan proudly carries the brand "**March Town Plan by March Town People**" and this only serves to reinforce the lengths March Town Council has gone to ensure that March residents and businesses are at the heart of the Plan.

As it is not the aim of the Plan to replicate material already addressed in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework or Fenland District Council's adopted Local Plan, the proposed policies are limited to those areas where it is felt that more clarity is required in order to ensure the vision, aims and objectives of the Plan are met. The final version of the Plan is fully in accordance with both of these key planning documents, which is essential in meeting the basic conditions of Neighbourhood Plan preparation.

The Plan does not address planning issues that do not have broad consensus or issues that are not related to land use planning or matters that fall within the remit of other statutory bodies and providers.

I would like to thank the members of March Town Council who worked on the preparation of the Plan, with notable contributions from Cllr Jan French, Cllr Robert Skoulding and the Town Clerk, Clive Lemmon, and with a very special thanks to Cllr Kit Owen, who presided over the majority of the Plan making stages outlined above and who drove the Plan forward. It is my pleasure to present this plan to you, which we believe will have a positive impact on the quality of people's lives in March.

Cllr Kim French
March Town Mayor



How the Plan is Organised

The Plan is divided into **4 sections** which include the following:

Section 1 *Introduction*

This section considers how the Plan fits into the planning system and provides an overview of the stages of consultation carried out and in particular, how this has influenced the development of the Plan.

Section 2 *The vision for March*

This section sets out the overall vision for March in future years and identifies the key aims and objectives that will help deliver the vision.

Section 3 *Neighbourhood Plan Policies*

This section sets out the policies to support the vision, aims and objectives, including the justification for each policy.

Section 4 *Supporting Information*

This section highlights any deviation from the Fenland Local Plan, identifies the arrangements for the monitoring and review of the Plan, sets out the legal framework for the justification for the Plan, including the evidence base used, and acknowledges the contribution of members of March Town Council.

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Section 1 - Introduction

1.1

This Plan has been produced by March Town Council in consultation with the community. The March Neighbourhood Plan is a new type of planning document that will help guide development in March in key areas in the period up to 2030. It is part of the Government's new approach to planning, which aims to give local people more say about what goes on in their area. This is set out in the Localism Act that came into force in April 2012.

1.2

The Plan provides a vision for the future of the community and sets out clear policies to help realise this vision. These policies must accord with higher level planning policy, as required by the Localism Act. This includes the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Fenland District Council's adopted Local Plan (FLP). The Plan therefore does not attempt to replicate these strategic documents but simply to support them by providing more clarity in a number of areas that the community considers to be important and necessary.

1.3

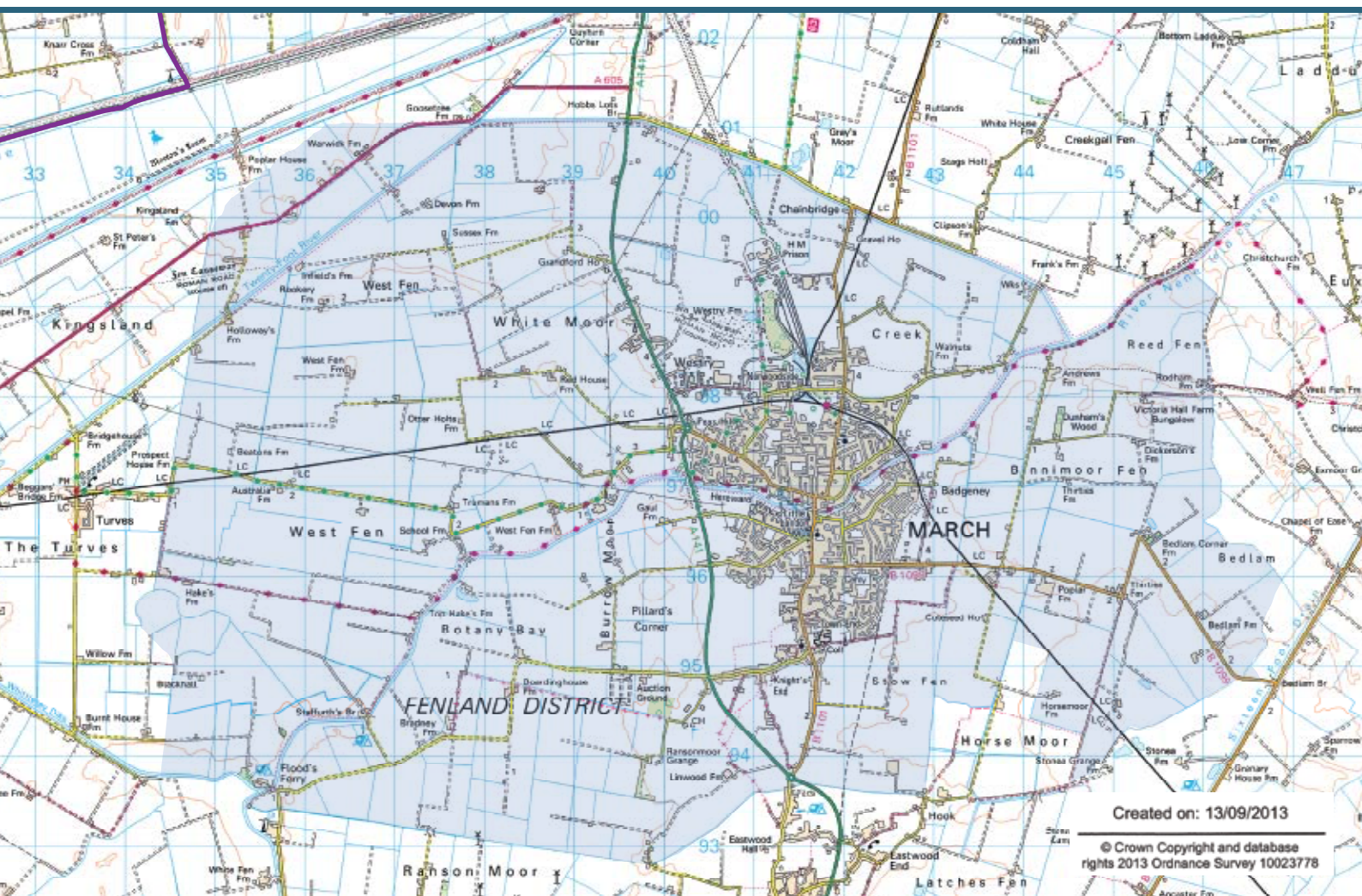
The Plan therefore reflects the key desires of the community, which are to provide local people with more certainty about the development of land for housing and, in particular, to ensure adequate infrastructure is provided and that important community assets are not lost or damaged in the process. It also attempts to help make the town centre a more attractive place to shop by protecting the primary shopping frontages and identifying opportunities for the improvement of the built environment.

Section 1 - Introduction

01 The Plan Boundary

1.4

The whole parish of March was formally designated a Neighbourhood Area under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (Part 2, Section 6) on 11 December 2013.



Legend

March Neighbourhood Area Boundary (Also March Parish Boundary)

Section 1 - Introduction

02 How the Neighbourhood Plan fits into the Planning System

1.5

Although the Government's intention is for local people to have a greater say on what goes on in their towns, the Localism Act sets out some important laws. One of these is that a Neighbourhood Plan must comply with higher level planning policy. This means that Neighbourhood Plans must be in line with European Union Regulations on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and habitats, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local policy, in particular, Fenland District Council's Local Plan (FLP).

1.6

As part of the development plan for Fenland District, the Neighbourhood Plan, together with the NPPF and the FLP (or any subsequent plan for Fenland District) will be the starting point for determining planning applications within March parish. The Neighbourhood Plan follows the strategic policies of the FLP by being in force until 2030. The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan are to be considered as a whole together with the strategic policies of the FLP.

1.7

The FLP (Policy LP4 – Housing) requires March to provide at least 4,200 homes in the period 2011 to 2030. Policy LP9 – March allocates the majority of this in three locations, which include two strategic allocations: South East March (around 600 dwellings) and West March (around 2000 dwellings), and a broad location for growth referred to as South-West March (around 500 dwellings and some business development). Although the Localism Act does not allow Neighbourhood Plans to provide less than this strategic allocation, it does not prevent them from introducing measures to ensure that these large strategic sites and opportunities from other sources, such as windfall development are delivered in a coordinated and transparent manner for the benefit of the residents of March.

Section 1 - Introduction

1.8

Whilst planning applications are still determined by Fenland District Council, the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for March will give local people a bigger say in how the town evolves by providing a policy framework in tune to local need for Fenland District Council to make decisions on behalf of the people of March.

03 What the Neighbourhood Plan covers

1.9

The form and content of Neighbourhood Plans varies greatly. Some Neighbourhood Plans are extremely ambitious and set out from the beginning to contain lots of policies covering many subjects, including making specific allocations; whilst some are very narrow in focus.

1.10

The scope and content of the March Neighbourhood Plan has been shaped entirely by the community, in which there is broad consensus for stronger and/or clearer advice in relation to a limited range of issues in order to more effectively support some of the policies of the FLP.

04 Community Engagement

1.11

The March Neighbourhood Plan belongs to the people of March. The Plan has been developed from the views of local people building on the work of a number of successive consultation and engagement events, which can be summarised on the following pages.

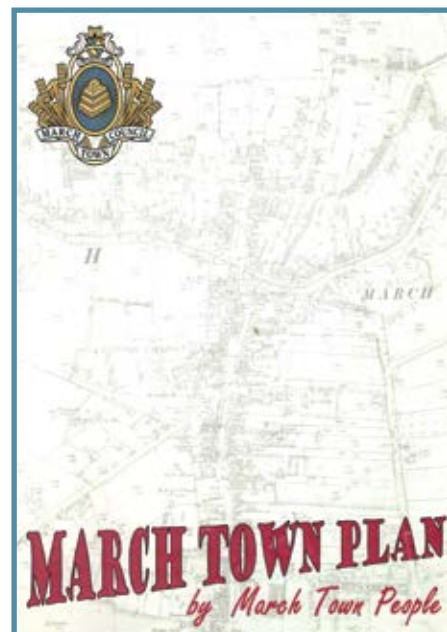
Section 1 - Introduction

1.11.1 - Town Wide Survey

On the 12 November 2013, March Town Council carried out a town wide survey in the form of a detailed questionnaire delivered to every household and the majority of businesses in the Plan area. The purpose of the survey was to help identify key issues, challenges, opportunities and priorities relating to the development and use of land. A total of 617 questionnaires were returned by the 16 December 2013 deadline. This exercise was supplemented by a number of engagement workshops with the youth and business community in April 2014. The results of the survey and supplementary work revealed a number of issues that needed to be looked at, which formed the basis for developing the Issues and Options work.

1.11.2 - Issues and Options Consultation

On the 19 May 2014 March Town Council launched an Issues and Options Consultation exercise with a public exhibition at The Oliver Cromwell Hotel, which attracted more than 150 people throughout the day. The consultation event ran for 6 weeks, during which a total of 23 comments forms were received. This, together with the considerable feedback given at the exhibition, helped shape the draft vision, aims and objectives for the Plan.



1.11.3 - Vision, Aims and Objectives Consultation

On the 11 October 2014 March Town Council launched a Vision, Aims and Objectives Consultation exercise with a public exhibition at The Oliver Cromwell Hotel, which attracted 130 visitors. The consultation event ran for 6 weeks during which a total of 150 comments forms were received. This work also included a number of workshops with different aged school children.

Section 1 - Introduction

1.11.4 - Pre-Submission Draft Plan Consultation

The statutory six-week consultation exercise was launched on the 20 March 2015. It was run on similar grounds to the previous consultation exercises, with the event launched with a public exhibition held at The Oliver Cromwell Hotel. However, on this occasion, the exhibition ran for two days. In addition to the event being promoted on the Town Council's website and on its Facebook page, including March Free Voice and Free Discussion and leaflets distributed around the town on market days, press notices appeared in Fenland Citizen on the 11 March 2015 and in the Cambs Times on the 6 March and again on the 13 March 2015. A number of statutory bodies, national service providers and local organisations/bodies were formally notified by e-mail and some by post.

The community feedback received at each consultation and engagement exercise enabled the scope and content of the Plan to be defined and provided a sound platform for the preparation of the planning policies contained within the submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan, which was examined in May 2017. The Examiner recommended that the Neighbourhood Plan proceed to referendum, subject to a number of modifications, which have been reflected in this final version of the Plan.

05 Sustainability Appraisal

Neighbourhood Plans are not technically subject to Sustainability Appraisal, provided they are in conformity with the development plan of the Local Planning Authority in terms of scale and distribution of growth planned. Although March Town Council believes that the Plan is in broad conformity with the FLP, it has carried out a Sustainability Appraisal to demonstrate that the March Neighbourhood Plan will help achieve sustainable development in its own right.



Section 2 - The Vision for March

01 Summary of Key Issues

2.1

The evidence gathered as part of the town-wide survey was categorised into broad areas of consensus that helped identify the key issues summarised below:



Housing

2.1.1 - The scale of housing development

The scale of housing growth is high and infrastructure services needs to be in place to ensure it can be properly accommodated, with preference to a phased approach to development.

2.1.2 - The type and mix of housing

New housing should meet the needs of the town with the aim of creating mixed and balanced communities. There is a real need for first time buyers.

2.1.3 - The location of future development

There is no need for more housing other than what is allocated in the Fenland Local Plan, and more clarity is required for windfall sites. The focus of development should be on brownfield land within the town centre.

Section 2 - The Vision for March

Employment

2.1.4 - The focus of employment

The town centre should be the focus for business with industry on the outskirts of the town. Jobs should be provided with housing.

Town Centre & Retail

2.1.5 - Achieving the right balance of town centre uses

The retail function of the town should be revitalised. A large part of the town centre has derelict and underused backland that could be used to regenerate the town centre with space for a large supermarket. Traffic congestion should be tackled with more parking provision.

Traffic & Transport

2.1.6 - Reducing the need for the car

Public transport must be improved with more dedicated segregated cycleways and footpaths. More parking enforcement is also needed.

Environment

2.1.7 - Ensuring appropriate levels of open space provision

There is a desperate shortage of accessible open space in the town. Estover playing field should be safeguarded.

Section 2 - The Vision for March

2.1.8 - Maximising the use of renewable energy

New development should incorporate renewable forms of energy, but large-scale wind and solar farms, including Fracking should be resisted.

2.1.9 - Protecting and enhancing wildlife

There is a shortage of wildlife areas in the town. Access to wildlife sites should be encouraged.

2.1.10 - Reduce the risk of flooding

All homes should be protected from flooding. Development should not be permitted in areas of high flood risk. Drains should be better maintained.

Sport & Active Leisure

2.1.11 - Improving leisure facilities through new development

More leisure facilities are required in the town. The existing leisure centre and swimming pool is substandard. More smaller play areas for children are needed. Access to school facilities should be encouraged.

Infrastructure

2.1.12 - Ensuring appropriate infrastructure to meet growth

The correct level of infrastructure and services must be provided to meet planned growth, and should attempt to meet current deficit in provision.

The majority of the feedback from those attending the exhibitions and who submitted comments forms was that the issues identified accurately reflected the main community concerns which, if appropriate and necessary, the Neighbourhood Plan should tackle.

Section 2 - The Vision for March

02 The Vision, Aims and Objectives

2.3

The vision, aims and objectives are based on the key issues summarised above. They have been adapted by March Town Council to form the basis of the Plan for March..

VISION

To improve the quality of life for people who live and/or work in March, including those who visit and depend on its services and facilities.

AIMS

- a. That growth within the town is accommodated sustainably.
- b. That new housing creates and maintains healthy mixed communities.
- c. That March Town Centre becomes a shopping destination of choice for residents, businesses and visitors.
- d. That the quality of the built and natural environment is improved.
- e. That the level of provision and quality of recreational land facilities is increased and improved.

Section 2 - The Vision for March

OBJECTIVES

- a. Provide more certainty about the sequence of development across the town and the delivery of infrastructure.
- b. Secure an appropriate mix of new housing informed by housing need.
- c. Secure the appropriate regeneration of the town centre, tackling long-standing issues around traffic, parking, retail offer and environment.
- d. Secure high quality development in all new schemes.
- e. Safeguard and improve all land and facilities of community importance and secure the provision of new land and facilities.

2.4

The level of support expressed for the vision, aims and objectives from those who commented as part of the Vision, Aims and Objectives consultation exercise can be summarised as follows:

Vision	96%
Aims	93%
Objectives	89%

It is considered that this level of support demonstrates that the community is satisfied with the Plan's vision, aims and objectives.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy H1 – Large Development Sites

This Neighbourhood Plan supports the major allocations on the edge of March, as set out in the Fenland Local Plan (2014), namely:

a) Strategic Allocations

1. South East March (around 600 dwellings)
2. West March (around 2000 dwellings)

b) Broad Locations for Growth

1. South West March (around 500 dwellings)
2. March Trading Estate (business use)

This Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any additional major development sites on the outskirts of March.

Development within the above allocated sites must accord with the policies in the Fenland Local Plan (especially LP7 and LP9), but the following additional requirements should be met:

1.

The Broad Concept Plan (BCP), which is required by Policy LP7 – Urban Extensions of the Fenland Local Plan, should be prepared with extensive, on-going, meaningful and cooperative engagement with the landowners, stakeholders and the community. This should include genuine opportunities for these bodies to shape the proposals, understand the key opportunities and constraints, and contribute their thoughts.

2.

Along side the final BCP, the applicant should demonstrate how the engagement with the community took place and how such views and aspirations of the community have been taken on board in shaping the proposals, together with, if applicable, an explanation as to why some suggestions and comments have not been taken on board.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

3.

The BCP should include a Phasing Plan with indicative timeframes.

4.

An infrastructure Schedule should be provided with the BCP, indicating what on and off-site infrastructure is necessary to fully support the development, identifying broadly where it will be located and in which phase it will be provided.

5.

Each BCP will ensure that all of the following matters are addressed where relevant:

- a) For the strategic allocations, the development area will be restricted to the allocated area as defined on the Key Diagram for March as set out in the Fenland Local Plan;
- b) For the broad locations for growth, the development area will make efficient use of land with regard to accommodating the approximate numbers identified or meeting the intended use, and with specific regard to meeting other criteria in this policy;
- c) It will identify where the primary and secondary access points in and out of each site will be located.
- d) It will identify the broad distribution of roads within each site and highlight the general movement of traffic within the site and onto the surrounding road network.
- e) It will identify the different uses of land within each site (residential, employment, retail, open space etc.), and provide an indicative area in hectares for each use, ensuring an appropriate balance and sustainable use of land is achieved;
- f) It will identify strategic landscaping belts to define the new outer edge of development and provide a green buffer to surrounding countryside;

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

- g) It will identify the broad design principles that will be applied with the aim of showing how local vernacular styles, patterns of development and materials will be reflected within the development;
- h) It will identify the areas at risk of flooding, including problems associated with surface water run-off both on and off-site and the measures to be employed to manage any identified risk.

The BCP should be formally considered by March Town Council, and its views recorded, prior to it being submitted to Fenland District Council for consideration.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

3.1

The Fenland Local Plan (FLP) covers the period 2011 to 2031, during which a total of 11,000 new homes are planned for the entire District. Policy LP4-Housing (Part A - Housing Targets) allocates this across the District, with 4,200 new homes (38%) allocated in March as the largest and most sustainable settlement in the District. These are predominantly accommodated within three locations, which include two strategic allocations at South East March and West March, and a Broad Location for Growth at South West March. The FLP refers to these areas as Urban Extensions.

3.2

Feedback from local residents and businesses as part of the March Town-Wide Survey identified a number of concerns in relation to the Town's ability to accommodate this scale of growth, particularly in relation to infrastructure. Proposed changes to the use of Section 106 monies, which took effect in April 2015, places restrictions on the pooling of resources towards infrastructure from different applications, and with the lack of any alternative approach such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), these concerns have been exacerbated. The provision of adequate infrastructure with these large schemes and transparency around this is therefore of paramount importance to the community.

3.3

Policy LP7-Urban Extensions of the FLP attempts to provide some context for how these sites should be developed and refers to the need for these urban extensions to be developed in accordance with "overarching broad concept plans" and provides some criteria to guide developers in the preparation of planning applications. However, March Town Council (MTC) does not feel that Policy LP7 provides sufficient clarity and assurances to the community that these Urban Extensions will be developed sustainably.

3.4

The March Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) attempts to address this by supplementing the overarching broad concept plan approach with additional requirements, including ensuring full engagement with the community.

3.5

The criteria set out in the Policy are largely based on feedback from the community, (further shaped by the Examiner) which cover important material planning considerations where it is felt this is not made clear in other Policies contained within the FLP. It is vitally important that these Urban Extensions are developed sustainably and that the community have a better understanding of how this will happen. It is considered that Policy H1 of the MNP will help achieve this.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy H2 – Windfall Development

Proposals for residential development will be supported where they meet the provisions of the Fenland Local Plan and where the following additional criteria are met:

- a) The proposal will not result in unacceptable impact on levels of light, privacy and private amenity space for the occupants of the proposed dwellings. The impact of proposals on existing neighbouring properties will be assessed against Policy LP16 of the FLP;
- b) The proposal will not result in the net loss of formal or informal open space; [See Policy OS1]
- c) The site is at a low risk of flooding (i.e. not within land designated Flood Zone 2 or 3 by the Environment Agency) and will not create flooding problems on or off-site, including problems associated with surface water run-off. Development within flood zones 2 and 3 will only be considered where appropriate sequential and exception tests have been met;
- d) The proposal includes a safe vehicular access and will not result in severe impacts on the road network taking account of any mitigation proposed.
- e) The proposal provides any on or off-site infrastructure required to make the development acceptable;
- f) The proposal is of a high standard of design; and
- g) The proposal will not result in the loss of community facilities or services unless the separate tests set out in Policy LP6 of the Fenland Local Plan are met.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Applicants should carry out appropriate and proportionate pre-application community consultation on schemes of 10 dwellings or more. The applicant should demonstrate the engagement with the community which took place and how such views and aspirations of the community have been taken on board in shaping the proposals, together with, if applicable, an explanation as to why some suggestions have not been taken on board.

Justification

3.6

Windfall development usually relates to housing proposals that come forward on both brown field and green field sites that have not been specifically identified or allocated for development purposes in the Local Plan or this Neighbourhood Plan. It is accepted that there will be windfall development opportunities over the life of the Plan, with the FLP recognising that as many as 600 homes could come from this source in March alone over the life of the Plan.

3.7

Whilst it is recognised that such development could make a positive contribution towards improving the supply and choice of new homes in the town, and in some cases, improve the quality of life for existing residents; proposals will nevertheless be required to meet all of the criteria set out in Policy H2 in order to demonstrate its acceptability.

3.8

It is expected that the main growth within the town will take place on the strategic allocations and broad locations for growth, where it can be sustainably accommodated. However, it is recognised that some windfall opportunities may present themselves in other locations, which may be acceptable in planning terms. Such proposal will be assessed against the same criteria, with the additional requirement that the necessary amount of on and off-site infrastructure is provided.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

3.9

For proposals of 10 dwellings or more, applicants should demonstrate that they have carried out appropriate and proportionate community consultation at pre-application stage and show how feedback has been carried forward into their proposals and if applicable, justify why any feedback cannot be incorporated into the design.

Policy H3 – Local Housing Need

All housing proposals will be required to contribute towards meeting local housing need, which includes starter homes, family homes, executive homes and self build homes; and mixed tenure that will result in a diverse community, where this is reasonably achievable.

For proposals of more than 10 dwellings (new build and conversions), a minimum of 25% of dwellings (rounded to the nearest whole dwelling) must be affordable. The exception to this will be where the applicant can demonstrate on the basis of an accurate viability assessment using a recognised assessment model, that meeting the full 25% is unviable. In such cases, a lesser negotiated amount will be acceptable.

If a proposal for less than 11 dwellings is followed by an obviously linked second proposal that would take the cumulative number of dwellings above the affordable housing threshold while the original approval remains extant, or within 5 years of the completion of the original proposal, a 25% contribution towards affordable housing will be required based on the cumulative total of dwellings from both schemes.

All affordable housing shall be provided on site unless there are exceptional circumstances that necessitate provision on another site. Where off-site provision can be justified, Policy H2 will apply. Payments of financial contributions in lieu of direct provision will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that off-site provision is not viable. In such circumstances, any contributions will be used on meeting a need in March as a first option where this is deliverable.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

3.10

It is recognised that the provision of affordable housing is a key aim of the Fenland Local Plan. March Town Council believes that sustainable development will only be achieved if all sectors of the community are catered for. In addition to affordable housing, this includes providing opportunities for the young to gain access to the housing market and meeting needs such as executive homes, self build homes and the elderly.

3.11

Where developers are required to meet an identified level of affordable housing, lesser amounts should only be accepted where viability evidence has been robustly scrutinised. Attempts to bring forward developments under affordable housing thresholds incrementally as a way of avoiding making contributions must also be controlled. On-site provision is the preferred approach, followed by off-site provision in exceptional circumstances. Where this is not possible, any financial contributions in lieu of direct provision will be used to meet a need in March where this is deliverable.

Policy TC1 – Primary Shopping Frontages

In the Primary Shopping Frontages, as show in the plan below and where planning permission is required, change of use from retail (Class A1) to other uses (such as Class A2, A3, A4 and A5) will not be permitted where:

- a) it would result in non-retail frontages exceeding 40% of the Primary Shopping Frontage of the town centre as a whole;
- b) it would introduce uses that do not complement the shopping function of the town centre;
- c) it would create a concentration of 5 non-retail uses that would have a harmful effect on the primary shopping function of the town centre; or
- d) It would have a harmful effect on residential amenity by way of noise, smells and late night disturbance.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

An exception to Criteria a) will be permitted where:

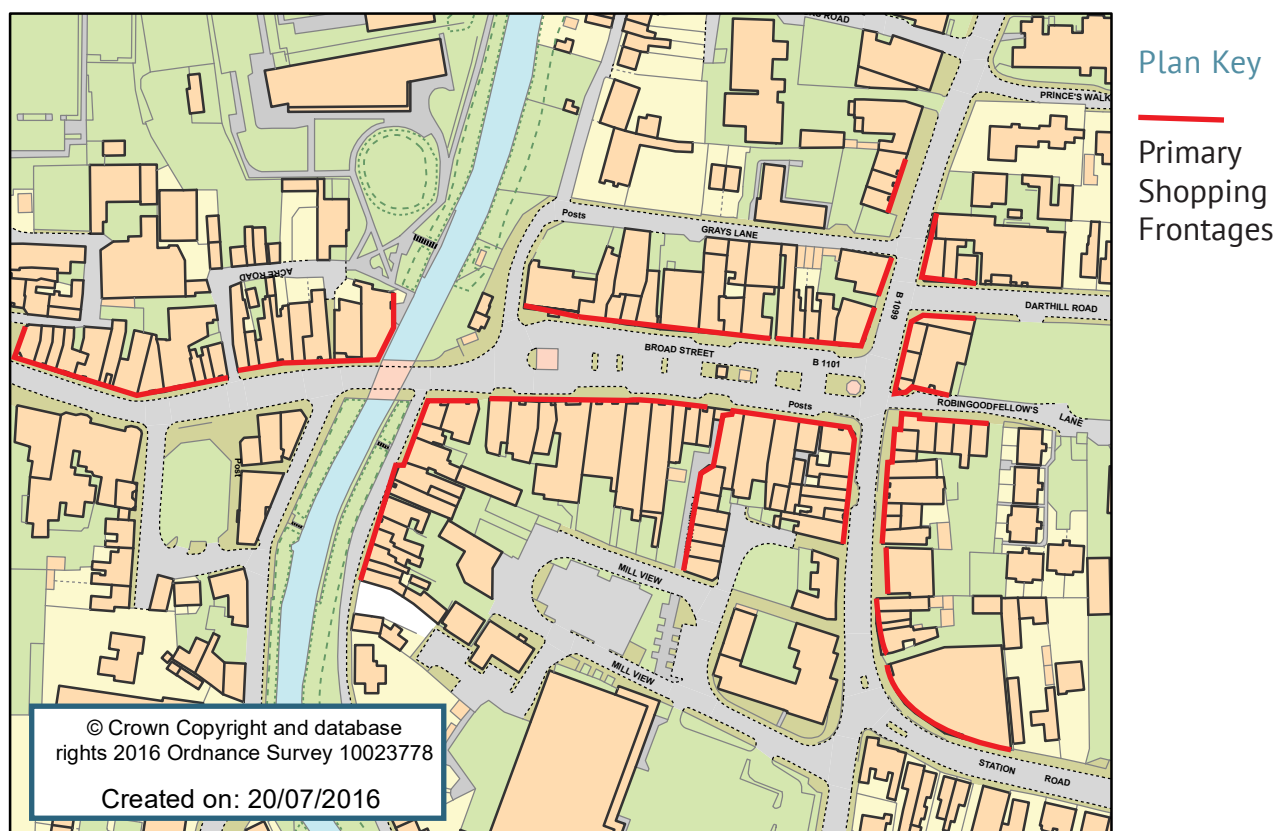
1.

it would secure the re-use of an existing unit that has been vacant for at least 12 months and/or has been neglected to the extent that it is having a harmful effect on the quality of the built environment; and/or.

2.

it relates to the development of the areas identified under Policy TC2 (where these include Primary Shopping Frontages) where proposals would secure significant improvements to the quality of the environment and make March Town Centre a more attractive place to shop and visit.

New retail development located outside of the Town Centre boundary (as defined in the Fenland Local Plan Policies Map – Inset Map: March South), in excess of 500sq m gross floor space, and the expansion of existing shopping areas where the new floor space would exceed 500sq m gross will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated by way of an impact assessment (as defined in the NPPF) that it will not harm the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.



Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

3.12

March Town Centre has traditionally been the focus for shopping and for community, cultural and entertainment activities, and whilst it recognised that the role of town centres are changing, March Town Council wishes to ensure the future viability of the town centre, recognising the importance of providing local residents with shops and associated facilities as an important contribution towards sustainable development objectives.

3.13

The Fenland Local Plan (FLP) identifies both a Primary Shopping Area, and within this, Primary Shopping Frontages, which are referred to in Policy LP6-Employment, Tourism, Community Facilities and Retail, and identified on the March South Inset Map. March Town Council carried out a Primary Shopping Frontage survey in February 2015, which revealed that there are currently 103 units within the FLP defined Primary Shopping Frontages with a combined frontage of 860 metres. Of this, the predominant use was A1 retail (61%), followed by A2, financial and professional services (19.4%), with food and drink (A3, A4 and A5) accounting for approximately 15%. With an almost negligible vacancy rate, the survey revealed that the town centre has a healthy retail function within its Primary Shopping Frontages.

3.14

The survey also provided an opportunity to review the extent of the Primary Retail Frontages. As part of this exercise it was considered that there were a number of areas that should be included within the Primary Shopping Frontages and also a number of areas that should be removed. The March Neighbourhood Plan has addressed this by excluding approximately 47 metres of designated Primary Shopping Frontage and including 86 metres of new Shopping Frontage. The Examiner also recommended a further 28m of frontage be included, which overall has provided a net gain of 67 metres of Primary Shopping Frontage.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

3.15

On this basis it is felt that allowing a maximum of 40% non-A1 retail frontages within the Primary Retail Frontages is an achievable sustainable objective. This target builds in some flexibility to allow more non-retail uses (A2, A3, A4 and A5), which generate high levels of pedestrian activity at a scale that will be complementary to its retail function. However, the level of vacancy within the Primary Shopping Frontages will be monitored and if it is felt that the policy is having a negative effect in terms of increases in vacant units, the policy will be reviewed.

3.16

Whilst it is recognised that there is a need for some retail activity outside of the town centre, Policy TC1 will ensure that this will not have a harmful effect on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Regeneration of Town Centre Sites

3.17

There are a number of areas within and close to the town centre in which it is felt that the quality of the built environment is having a harmful effect on its attractiveness as a place to shop and visit and that this is a disincentive for major retail chains to invest in the area. The quality of the environment and the lack of retail choice from brand shops was highlighted as a significant concern by the community.

3.18

Three key areas have been identified in which the need for improvement is considered to be the greatest. The March Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to encourage investment within these areas by identifying them as opportunities for development with the key aims of improving the quality of the built environment and increasing the attractiveness of March Town centre as a place to shop and visit.

3.19

The March Neighbourhood Plan provides some objectives to assist developers in coming forward with schemes in all three locations, which it is felt will provide an incentive for potential investment.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy TC2 – Regeneration Sites

The Plan identifies three sites where it is felt that there is an opportunity to improve the physical appearance of the town centre and enhance the quality of the environment.

These include the sites listed below:

Site 1 - Land to the west of the High Street

Site 2 - Land to the south of Station Road

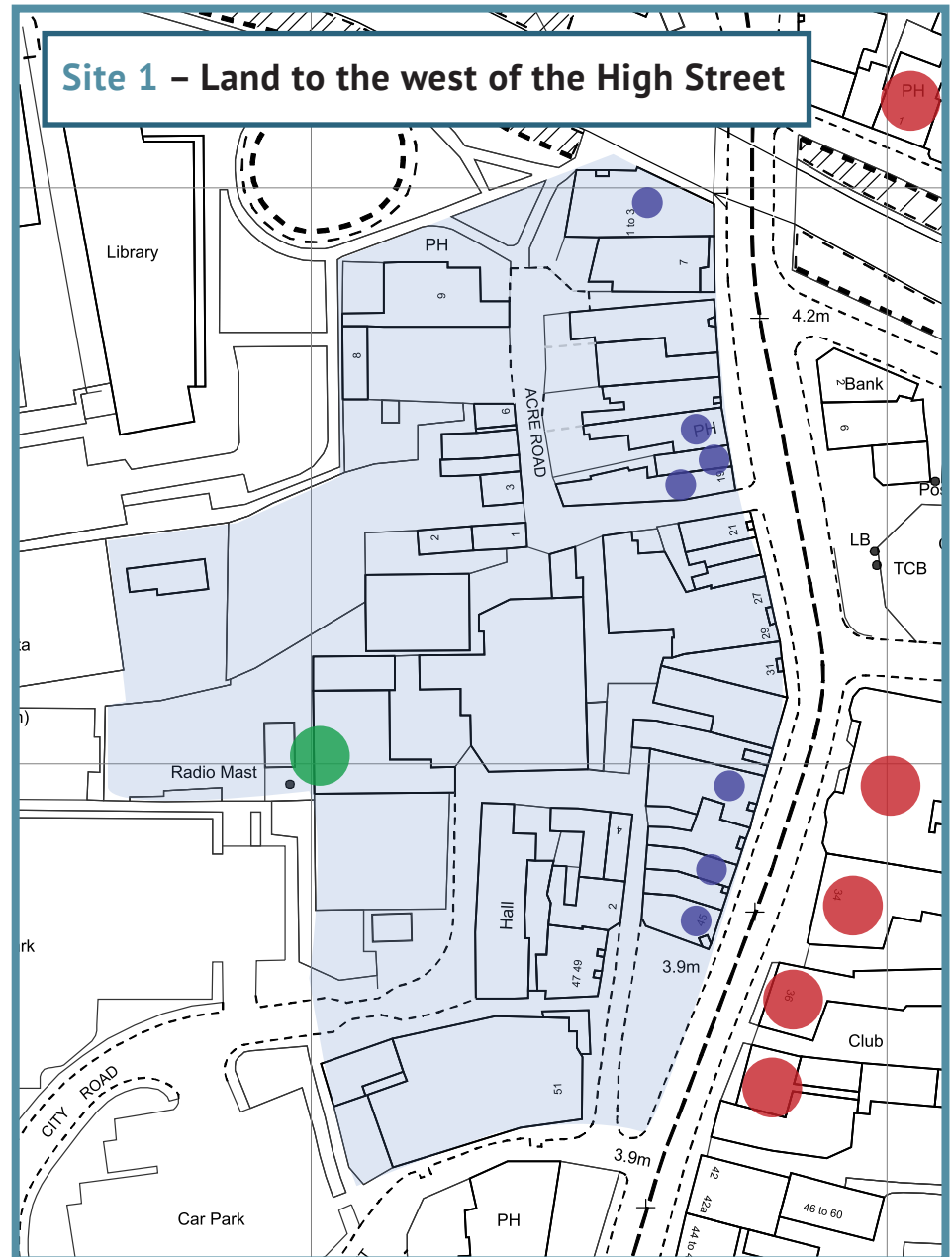
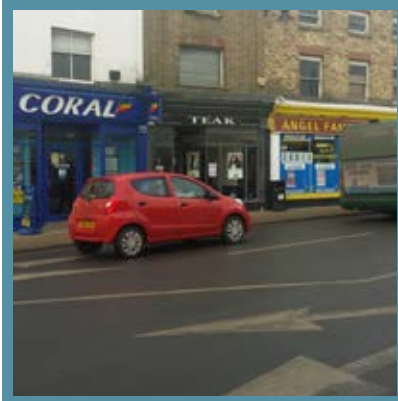
Site 3 - Land to the north of Centenary Church

Site 1 – Land to the west of the High Street

The full or partial redevelopment of this site for appropriate town centre uses will be supported where the following is achieved:

- a) The quality of the built environment is significantly improved;
- b) Where a mixed use is proposed, it would increase the attractiveness of the town centre as a place to visit and shop;
- c) The conservation area is preserved and where possible, enhanced;
- d) Designated and non-designated heritage assets and areas, including areas of archaeological importance are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Where redevelopment proposals require the loss of non-designated heritage assets, there will be a requirement that all such losses are fully justified and clearly outweighed by wider public benefits delivered by the redevelopment. The design of any redevelopment will be required to respect the setting of nearby listed buildings.
- e) Pedestrian connectivity between the High Street and the land to the west, including the Library, Leisure Centre and car park is improved;
- f) Where redevelopment is proposed affecting the existing Primary Shopping Frontage in full or in part, a shopping frontage on to the High Street is provided; and
- g) Provide well-designed car and cycle parking appropriate to the amount and type of development proposed, reflecting the parking standards provided by Fenland District Council.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies



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Plan Key

- Area of Site
- Buildings of Local Interest
- Area of Archaeological Interest
- Listed Buildings

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

Site 1 – Land to the west of the High Street

3.20

This site comprises a substantial area of land and buildings that extend to approximately 1.5 hectares in area. The site includes the land to the west of the High Street between the River Nene in the north to George Street in the south. It extends westward up to the District Council car park in the south, encompassing land adjacent to the sub-station and the Leisure Centre car park and Library foreground in the north.

3.21

Many of the commercial properties fronting the High Street have a run down appearance, with some in significant state of disrepair. These properties have long back yards that connect with a number of narrow access roads that continue from George Street, City Road and Acre Road. There are a number of small buildings located within this area, which include the Masonic Hall, and a variety of lock ups.

3.22

A significant proportion is derelict and abandoned, including the site of the former Ogden's Indoor Market off Acre Road (which has approval for demolition), with a number of older properties in a significant state of disrepair. It also includes the grounds of the Young People of March. Land to the west is more open and unkempt in appearance. There are no Listed Buildings on the site but there are a number of Buildings of Local Interest that front on to the High Street. The majority of the site falls within the March Conservation Area. There is an area of archaeological interest to the west of the site. Any development within the associated 20m wide maintenance access strip along the Old River Nene will require written consent from the Middle Level Commissioners.

3.23

It is recognised that the land is in multiple ownership and that this could prove problematic in terms of land assembly. Notwithstanding this, it is felt that this area needs to be identified as a location for improvement and that there is potential for a scheme to come forward in part, if not in totality, to address a number of issues that will help regenerate the Town Centre and therein address many of the concerns of the community.

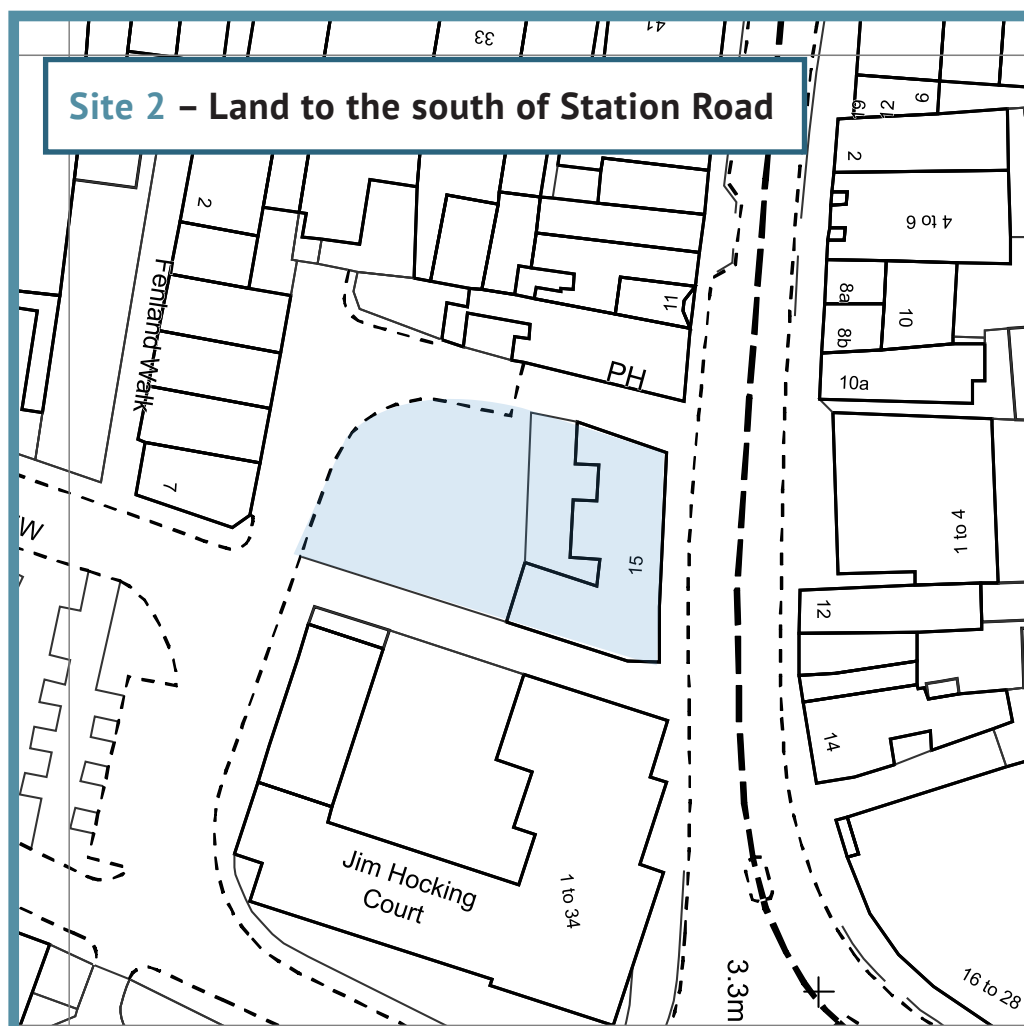
Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Site 2 – Land to the south of Station Road

The redevelopment of this site for town centre uses will be supported where the following is achieved:

- a) Where a shopping use is proposed, the length of frontage is maximised;
- b) The quality of the built environment is improved;
- c) The pedestrian links to the east and west are maintained;
- d) The design will complement the character and appearance of the adjacent conservation area;
- e) Provide well-designed car and cycle parking appropriate to the amount and type of development proposed, reflecting the parking standards provided by Fenland District Council; and
- f) Vehicular access is from the rear.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies



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Plan Key



Area of Site

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

Site 2 – Land to the south of Station Road

3.24

This a relatively small site, which includes a building that has been removed from the Primary Shopping Frontages as defined in the Fenland Local Plan. The building is in a significant state of disrepair with blacked out frontages and severe structural damage to the roof, which has started to collapse. The site is in effect in a gateway location on the northern approach to the Town Centre, which comes into view as the bend in the road opens up. It also has well used public footpaths along its eastern and western sides that lead onto Mill View, which compound the harm. The land to the rear is used informally for parking.

3.25

Previous attempts to redevelop the site have been resisted due to the potential loss of A1 retail frontage. Whilst Policy TC1 provides exception criteria for the loss of A1 retail frontage in situations where the unit has been vacant long term and/or is harming the environment, the situation here is such that the site merits special attention as a regeneration site in its own right.

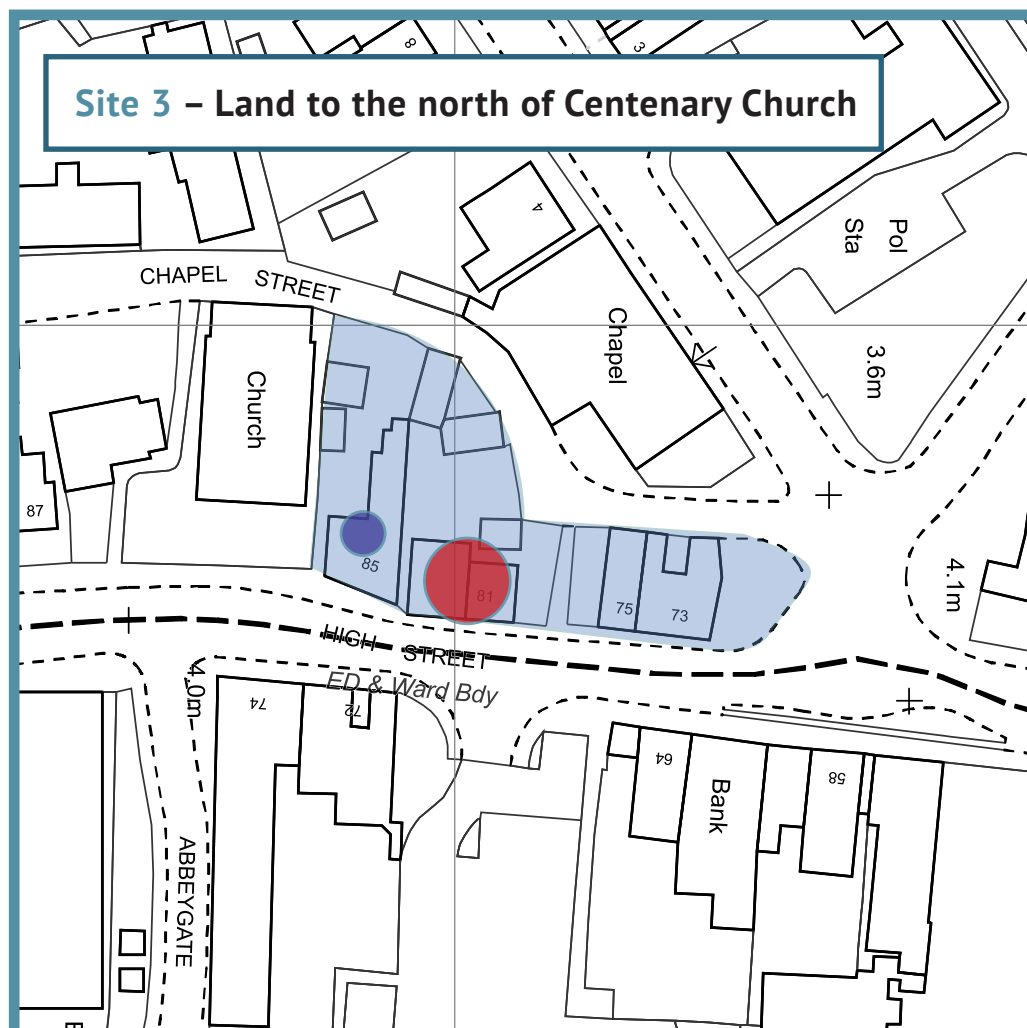
Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Site 3 – Land to the north of Centenary Church

The redevelopment of this site for town centre uses will be supported where the following is achieved:




- a) The quality of the built environment is improved;
- b) Designated and non-designated heritage assets and areas, including areas of archaeological importance are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance;
- c) Any shopping uses have a continuous frontage with the High Street;
- d) Vehicular access is from Chapel Street; and
- e) Provide well-designed car and cycle parking appropriate to the amount and type of development proposed, reflecting the parking standards provided by Fenland District Council.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies



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Plan Key

-  Area of Site
-  Building of Local Interest
-  Listed Building

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

Site 3 – Land to the north of Centenary Church

3.26

This site includes the land between High Street and Chapel Street from Centenary Church up to Burrowmoor Road, which comprises a mixture of shopping, commercial and residential uses.

3.27

Although all of the site falls within the March Conservation Area and there are both designated and non-designated heritage assets on site, overall the site has an unattractive appearance, with some buildings in a significant state of disrepair, which is having a harmful effect on the quality of the local environment in what is considered to be a gateway location to the town centre.

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy OS1 – Open Space

Proposals for development that would result in the loss of formal and informal open space will not be permitted unless replacement provision is secured of equivalent or greater quality and quantity in a sustainable location, and is brought into use prior to the loss of existing provision.

All proposals for new dwellings will be required to provide open space in accordance with the standards set out in Appendix B – “Open Space Standards” of the Fenland Local Plan. For schemes larger than 10 dwellings where it is impractical to provide the required level of provision on site, this will be required to be provided on off-site locations that can be accessed by residents of the new residential areas. Where this also proves impracticable, a financial contribution will be required equal to the value of the land that would have been required, which will be spent on improving existing open space provision and recreation facilities in March.

Proposals for a town park will be supported, provided it is in a location that is accessible to the majority of residents by sustainable modes of travel.

Where appropriate and safe, public access should be encouraged onto existing and new wildlife habitats, which should be integrated with public open space provision.



March Town Park - 2016

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Justification

3.28

It is acknowledged that there is a significant under provision of accessible open space in March. In 2003, The Fenland District Wide Local Plan Play Space Provision Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) identified an overall shortage of 2.11 Hectares in provision based on the standards set by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). In 2006 Fenland District Council carried out an open space audit of the District, which revealed that the overall shortage had increased to 4.23 Hectares. The study revealed that at that time there was a deficit in outdoor sports provision of 19.61 Hectares and a surplus of 15.38 Hectares in children's play provision. It also predicted that the situation would worsen by 2021 with the deficit in outdoor sport provision increasing to 26.60 Hectares with a reduction in the surplus of children's play provision to 12.50 Hectares. These figures were predicated on an anticipated population increase of 4,400 in the period 2006-2021. However, as the Fenland Local Plan identifies a housing land requirement in March of 4,200 dwellings in the period 2011-2031, these projections are conservative at best.

3.29

The community recognise the extent of the problem and have highlighted this as one of its main concerns in early engagement work, with current open space provision being regarded as one of its most precious assets. It is therefore vital that both formal and informal open space is safeguarded from development pressure, and in particular, land in use or which has been used for outdoor sports.

3.30

March Town Council is supportive of the District Council's desire to allocate land as a town park, provided it is in a location that can be accessed sustainably by residents and will contribute towards the current deficit in outdoor sports.



Estover Playing Fields - 2016

Section 3 - Neighbourhood Plan Policies

01 Relationship to the Fenland Local Plan

4.1 The policies in this Plan support the strategic policies of the Fenland Local Plan (FLP). However, a number of policies and supporting information introduce some differences, which are highlighted below:

4.2 Policy H1

Policy H1 requires more information to be provided as part of the Broads Concept Plans as specified in Policy LP7 of the FLP and reinforced the need for inclusive community consultation and the involvement of March Town Council in the making of such Plans.

4.3 Policy H2

This policy seeks to involve the community in development proposals. Schemes of more than 10 dwellings should be the subject of pre-application community consultation.

4.4 Policy H3

This amends the threshold for which a contribution towards affordable housing is required and does not seek contributions on schemes of less than 11 dwellings in line with Government advice. It also requires in lieu contributions to be spent on schemes in March where this would be deliverable.

4.5 Policy TC1

This policy adjusts the area of Primary Shopping Frontages, with a net overall gain. However, it sets a maximum threshold for the loss of non-retail frontages of 40%, which is higher than the threshold set in FLP Policy LP6.

4.6 Policy OS1

This policy restricts the further loss of open space. It also requires in lieu financial contributions from new schemes where open space cannot be provided on or off site to be spent on improving existing facilities in March.

Section 4 – Supporting Information

02 Monitoring and Review of the Plan

4.7 March Town Council is committed to monitoring the effectiveness of the policies of the Plan over the Plan period. Where indicators show that the policies are not delivering the intended outcomes, then a review of the Plan will be considered. Details of all monitoring and review work will be made available on the Town Council's website.

03 Reference Documents

4.8 The following documentation was used in preparing this Plan:

- Fenland Local Plan 2014
- Localism Act 2011
- Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012
- National Planning Policy Framework 2012
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990
- March Conservation Area Appraisal 2008

The following documentation was also used and is available to view on the Town Council website under the title

Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base

www.marchtowncouncil.gov.uk

- Application to designate a Neighbourhood Area (09/13)
- Preliminary Town-Wide Survey Results (02/14)
- Summary Analysis of Town-Wide Survey Results
- Issues & Options Summary Comments Schedule (09/14)
- Key Messages from Issues & Options Consultation
- Draft Vision, Aims & Objectives
- Vision, Aims & Objectives: Summary Comments Schedule
- Vision, Aims & Objectives: Analysis of Feedback
- Sustainability Assessment – Stage 1
- Town Centre Primary Retail Frontage Survey (02/15)
- Regulation 18 Draft Plan Consultation (03/15)
- A Report to Fenland District Council on the Examination of the March Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030 (19/05/2017)

Section 4 – Supporting Information

04 Acknowledgements

4.9

Acknowledgement and thanks are due to the following members of March Town Council who played a part in delivering this Plan

March North Councillors



Cllr Kim French



Cllr Malcolm George



Cllr Stephen Court



Cllr John Gowing

March East Councillors



Cllr Nigel Harris



Cllr Andrew Pugh



Cllr Martin Field



Cllr Mark Purser

March West Councillors



Cllr Andrew Donnelly



Cllr Kit Owen



Cllr Jan French



Cllr Rob Skoulding

With Thanks to Derek McKenzie of MTP McKenzie Town Planning Ltd
for all of his help and support in the making of this plan



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