

March Town Plan by March Town People

MARCH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2015 – 2030

**CONSULTATION DRAFT
March 2015**



Produced by March Town Council

Foreword

March Town Council, as a qualifying body, is embarking on the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, which if approved will become 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. We therefore want to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan because we believe that it will help local people to have a greater say in planning decisions on matters that are important to them.

The consultation draft March Neighbourhood Plan (the draft Plan) has been community led in that it 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, and a vision, aims and objectives consultation in October 2014, 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, which is now before you for formal consultation.

The March Town Plan proudly carries the brand "*March Town Plan by March Town People*" and March Town Council has gone to great lengths to ensure that March residents and businesses are at the heart of the draft Plan.

As it is not the aim of the draft Plan to replicate material already addressed in both the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or the recently adopted Fenland Local Plan (FLP), 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 draft Plan are met. We take the view that the draft Plan is fully in accordance with both the NPPF and the FLP, which is essential in meeting the basic conditions of Neighbourhood Plan preparation, and that by providing such clarity, the proposed policies are not in conflict with these strategic planning documents.

The draft 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.

This draft Plan is intended to provide an opportunity for you to comment on the work done to date and help us shape the final version of the Plan. We welcome any comments you may wish to make, but would ask that you ensure they are made on the appropriate form and returned to the Town Clerk at the Town Hall by no later than **Friday 1 May 2015**.

*Cllr Kit Owen,
March Town Mayor*

How the Plan is organised

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

Section 1 – Introduction

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

Section 2 – The vision for March

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

Section 3 – Proposed Policies

This section sets out the policies to support the vision, aims and objectives, including the justification for each policy, and highlights any deviation from the Fenland Local Plan.

Section 4 – Supporting Information

This section sets out the legal framework for the justification for the draft Plan, including the evidence base used. It also acknowledges the contribution of members of MTC.

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Section 1 – Introduction

Introduction

1.1 This draft Plan has been produced by March Town Council in consultation with the community. The March Neighbourhood Plan will be 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 draft 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 and Fenland District Council's recently adopted Local Plan. The draft 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 draft 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.

The Plan Boundary

1.4 The whole parish of March has been formally designated a Neighbourhood Area through an application made on 3 September 2013 under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (Part 2, Section 6), which was approved by Fenland District Council on 19 December 2013. A plan of the Neighbourhood Area forms Appendix 1.

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 be in line 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.

1.6 As part of the development plan for Fenland District, the Neighbourhood Plan, together with the Local Plan (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 Fenland Local Plan 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 Local Plan.

1.7 The Local Plan (Policy LP4 – Housing) requires March to provide at least 4,200 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 are delivered in a coordinated and transparent manner for the benefit of the residents of March.

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.

What does the Neighbourhood Plan cover?

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 Fenland Local Plan.

Community Engagement

- 1.11 The March Neighbourhood Plan belongs to the people of March. The draft 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 as follows:

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.

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 feedback given at the exhibition, helped shape the draft vision, aims and objectives for the Plan.

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 100 visitors throughout the day. 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.

- 1.12 The community feedback received at each consultation and engagement exercise has enabled the scope and content of the draft Plan to be defined and provide a sound platform for the preparation of planning policies.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 1.13 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 draft Plan is in broad conformity with the Fenland District Council Local Plan, 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

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

The scale of housing development

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

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.

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.

EMPLOYMENT

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

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

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

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.

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.

Protecting and enhancing wildlife

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

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 AND ACTIVE LEISURE

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

Ensuring appropriate infrastructure to meet growth

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

- 2.2 The majority of the feedback from those attending the exhibition 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.

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 draft 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.*

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%) and Objectives (89%).

Section 3 – Proposed Policies

Summary

- 3.1 The proposed policies of the March Neighbourhood Plan include the following:

HOUSING

H1 – Large Development Sites

H2 – Windfall Development

H3 – Local Housing Need

TOWN CENTRE

TC1 – Primary Shopping Frontages

TC2 – Town Centre Regeneration Sites

OPEN SPACE

OS1 – Protection of Open Space

NATURE CONSERVATION

NC1 – Nature Conservation

HOUSING

Policy H1 - Large Development Sites

This Policy applies to the sites allocated in the Fenland Local Plan under Policy LP9-March, supported by Policy LP7-Urban Extensions, which include the sites listed below:

- 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)

Development within the above areas must be considered in a holistic and coordinated way as part of a comprehensive masterplan for each area, which will be prepared by landowners/developers in consultation with the community before it is adopted by Fenland District Council (FDC) as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Each proposal will be considered in accordance with the relevant masterplan SPD. Proposals that are contrary to the provisions of the masterplan SPD, or would have a harmful effect on the future development of the masterplanned area, will not be permitted.

Where it can be demonstrated that in order to remove a potential development blockage and/or build in more certainties regarding the future sustainable development of the masterplan area, the necessary alterations to the masterplan SPD to accommodate such changes will be supported, provided the change is prepared in consultation with the community.

Each masterplan will address all of the criteria listed in Appendix 2.

Justification

- 3.2 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.

- 3.3 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 pooling of Section 106 monies, which take effect in April 2015 allow only 5 schemes to pool resources towards infrastructure. The alternative approach, and obvious solution would be to introduce the Community Infrastructure Levy. However, Fenland District Council has made a decision not to consider this within the next 3 years, which only exacerbates the problem. The provision of adequate infrastructure with these large schemes and transparency around this is therefore a genuine concern.
- 3.4 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.

- 3.5 The March Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) attempts to address this by replacing then need for overarching broad concept plans with detailed masterplans, which are to be prepared by the landowners/developers in consultation with the community. In order to increase the material weight of these masterplans it is expected that FDC will adopt them as Supplementary Planning Documents.
- 3.6 The criteria, which each masterplan will be expected to cover, are set out in Appendix 2. These are largely based on feedback from the community, which cover important material planning considerations. It is vitally important that these Urban Extensions are developed sustainably and that the community understands how this will happen. It is considered that Policy H1 of the MNP will help achieve this. Given that these Urban Extensions form part of an adopted Local Plan, where land identified for development forms part of its housing targets and the necessary investigations into ownership and availability will have already been undertaken, it is not anticipated that the introduction of a masterplanning approach will impede development.

H2 - Windfall Development

Proposals for residential development of up to 10 dwellings will be supported where the following criteria are met:

- a) The site does not form part of a strategic allocation or is situated within a broad location for growth as defined in Policy H1;
- b) The site comprises at least 70% previously developed land;
- c) The proposal will not have a harmful effect on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties;
- d) The proposal will not result in unacceptable living conditions for the occupants of the proposed dwellings;
- e) The proposal will not result in the net loss of formal or informal open space; [see Policy OS1]
- f) The proposal will not have a harmful effect on the natural or built heritage;
- g) 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;

h) The proposal has a safe vehicular access, will not cause traffic problems on or off-site, and links with the existing public footpath network;

- i) The proposal introduces the right mix and type of housing to meet local need; [see Policy H3]
- j) The proposal is of the highest standard of design; and
- k) The proposal will not result in the loss of community facilities or services.

Proposals for developments of more than 10 dwellings will be considered on their individual merits with regard to the above criteria and the degree of community benefit. Applicants will be required to carry out separate pre-application community consultation on schemes of more than 10 dwellings.

Justification

- 3.7 It is accepted that there may be windfall development opportunities over the life of the Plan, which 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.

3.8 Windfall development will therefore be required to meet all of the criteria set out in Policy H2 in order to demonstrate its acceptability. Further clarification on some of the criteria can be found in Policy H1 (Appendix 2).

3.9 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 of more than 10 dwellings 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 they offer some community benefit

such as additional public open space. Such schemes will be the subject of pre-application community consultation, where applicants will be required to demonstrate in a statement of community involvement how any feedback received has been reflected in the design of the scheme.

Policy H3 - Local Housing Need

All housing proposals will be required to demonstrate how they are meeting local housing need, which includes housing tenure and type, catering for all sectors of the community.

For proposals of more than 9 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 10 dwellings is followed by an obviously linked second proposal (also of less than 10 dwellings) 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.

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. It is also felt that homes should be designed to be of a Lifetime Homes Standard to enable people to live in their homes for as long as possible.

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.

TOWN CENTRE

Policy TC1 – Primary Shopping Frontages

In the Primary Shopping Frontages, as defined in Appendix 3, 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 uses exceeding 40% of the Primary Shopping Frontages;
- b) it would introduce uses that do not compliment the shopping function of the town centre;
- c) it would create a concentration of similar non-retail uses; and
- d) It would have a harmful effect on residential amenity

An exception to Criteria a) will be permitted where:

1. it would secure the re-use of an existing unit that has been vacant long term and has been neglected to the extent that it is having a harmful effect on the quality of the built environment; and

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 Primary Shopping Area (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.

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 wish 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 Retail Frontage and including 86 metres of new frontage, which has provided a net gain of 39 metres of Primary Retail Frontage, which has had the effect of increasing the A1 and A2 frontages by approximately 2%.
- 3.15 On this basis it is felt that allowing a maximum of 40% non-A1 retail use 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.
- 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.

Policy TC2 – Regeneration Sites

The draft 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 are described below and identified in Appendix 4.

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) A suitable mixed use is proposed;
- c) The conservation area is preserved and enhanced;
- d) Where possible, non-designated heritage assets and areas of archaeological importance are retained and preserved;
- e) 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;

- g) Proposed uses increase the attractiveness of the town centre as a place to visit and shop; and

- h) Off-road parking is provided.

Site 2 – Land to the south of Station Road

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

- a) Where a shopping use is proposed, the area of frontage is maximised;
- b) The quality of the environment is significantly improved;
- c) The pedestrian links to the east and west are maintained;
- d) Off-road parking is provided; and
- e) Vehicular access is from the rear.

Site 3 – Land to the north of Centenary Church

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

- a) The quality of the environment is significantly improved;
- b) The conservation area, and where possible, designated and non-designated heritage assets are preserved and enhanced;
- c) Any shopping uses have a continuous frontage with the High Street;
- d) Vehicular access is from Chapel Street with off-road parking provision; and
- e) The public footpath and main road (High Street) is widened at its narrowest point.

Justification

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.

Site 1 – Land to the west of the High Street

3.19 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.

3.20 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.

Site 2 - Land to the south of Station Road

- 3.21 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.
- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 The March Neighbourhood Plan provides some objectives to assist developers in coming forward with a scheme, which it is felt will provide an incentive for potential investment.
- 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 is harming the environment, the situation here is such that the site merits special attention as a regeneration site in its own right.
- 3.26 The March Neighbourhood Plan also provides some objectives to assist developers in coming forward with a scheme, which it is felt will provide an incentive for potential investment.

Site 3 – Land to the north of Centenary Church

3.27 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.

3.28 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.

3.29 For a significant part of the site's frontage with High Street, the public footpath and main road is narrow, which for pedestrians makes them feel at more risk to the dangers of oncoming traffic, which is forced close to the edge of the carriageway. It is considered that a redevelopment opportunity in this area could address this issue by providing land to allow the widening of both the main road and footpath, at the same time of improving the quality of the built environment on the approach to the town centre.

3.30 The March Neighbourhood Plan also provides some objectives to assist developers in coming forward with a scheme, which it is felt will provide an incentive for potential investment.

OPEN SPACE

Policy OS1 – Protection of Open Space

Proposals for development that would result in the net loss of formal and informal open space will not be permitted.

All proposals for residential development 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. Where it is impracticable to provide the required level of provision on site, this will be required to be provided on off-site locations reasonably close to the development in question. 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.

Justification

- 3.31 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 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 childrens 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 childrens 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.
- 3.32 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.
- 3.33 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.

NATURE CONSERVATION

Policy NC1 - Nature Conservation

Development proposals will be required to take into consideration the impact on sites of nature conservation value. Proposals that would result in the loss of a site of conservation value will not be permitted unless the proposal is deemed to be of national importance or appropriate off-site compensatory provision is made, and where possible, on site mitigation measures are introduced such as linking the site into existing wildlife corridors.

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

Justification

- 3.34 The community recognise the importance of nature conservation and value sites of local importance along with sites of acknowledged higher value. It is therefore important that development proposals have full regard for nature conservation in all new schemes and that habitat is not needlessly destroyed, and where possible is enhanced for the benefit of the wider public.

Relationship to the Fenland Local Plan

- 3.35 The policies in the draft 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:

Policy H1 & Appendix 2

Policy H1 will require the strategic housing allocations and broad locations for growth to be masterplanned, with each masterplan to be adopted as a SPD. This is at odds with FLP Policy LP7, which only requires these sites to be advanced with a broad concept plan, with an option for whether this is taken forward as an SPD or not.

Appendix 1 identifies the issues that each masterplan must address. Section 8 (c) "Design" sets a net average requirement of 40% private amenity space, which is higher than the FLP requirement of a third. Section 5 (d), "Access, Movement, Transport and Parking" only allows garages to be included as off-street parking where it meets a minimum dimension.

Policy H2

This policy defines windfall as schemes of up to 10 dwellings and requires such development to be on at least 70% previously developed land. It also restricts such developments in any of the strategic allocations and broad locations for growth. Schemes of more than 10 dwellings will additionally be assessed on their degree of community benefit and must consult with the community at pre-application stage.

Policy H3

This amends the threshold for which a contribution towards affordable housing is required for schemes under 10 dwellings in line with Government advice. It also requires in lieu contributions to be spent on schemes in March.

Policy TC1 & Appendix 3

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, which refers to maintaining the predominant retail element, which could see up to a 49% loss.

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.

Monitoring and Review of the Plan

- 3.36 March Town Council is concerned to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan is actively managed over the next 15 years. The plan will therefore be reviewed periodically to ensure that it takes into account possible changes in national planning policy or the Fenland Local Plan. Responsibility for providing the leadership for the March Neighbourhood Plan will rest with March Town Council. In 2020 and 2025 there will be a five year review of progress of the plan, which will identify whether a full or partial review is required. Details of all monitoring and review work will be made available on the Town Council's website.

Section 4 – Supporting Information

Reference Documents	Acknowledgements
4.1 The following documentation was used in preparing this draft Plan: Fenland Local Plan 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)	4.2 Acknowledgement and thanks are due to the following members of March Town Council who played a part in delivering this draft Plan: March North Councillors: Cllr Mike Cornwell Cllr Malcolm George Cllr Stephen Court Cllr Trevor Quince March East Councillors: Cllr Bernard Keane Cllr Andrew Pugh Cllr Gavin Philpot Cllr Mark Purser March West Councillors: Cllr Steve Count Cllr Kit Owen Cllr Jan French Cllr Rob Skoulding