

## Yaxham Neighbourhood Plan (NP4Yaxham) Working Group Response to Breckland Local Plan consultation

**To: Planning Policy Team, Breckland District Council**

The NP4Yaxham Working Group was set up in September 2015 under the auspices of the Yaxham Parish Council. Breckland Council agreed the designated area as the Civil Parish of Yaxham in its notice dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015. After extensive public consultation on issues, options and emerging policies the process is at an advanced phase of Step 2 (of 7 steps) in making a Neighbourhood Plan. It is anticipated that Step 3 – pre-submission consultation will commence in the near future, but not before the expiry of the current Local Plan consultation period. The process is sufficiently developed that the Working Group therefore feels it would be helpful to submit the following comments on the emerging Local Plan, and asks that Breckland accords these comments the appropriate weight due to the village consultation that has already been undertaken. The response is in three sections:

- 1) Specific response to selected policies and questions in “Breckland Local Plan, Part 1 Preferred Directions”, December 2015.
- 2) Comments on “Breckland Local Plan, Part 2 – Emerging Site Options”, December 2015, as they affect the civil parish of Yaxham.
- 3) NP4Yaxham’s emerging draft Strategic Green Gaps Policy for Breckland to consider, with particular reference to
  - a) reinforcing the importance of the distinctive and separate character of specific settlements, and
  - b) recognising the visual importance of maintaining the open-field and river valley systems that define the separation between such settlements, and militate against the coalescence of distinct and separate settlements.

The Working Group is happy to provide further information if that would be of assistance.

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Chairman, NP4Yaxham Working Group  
18<sup>th</sup> February, 2016

## **Yaxham Neighbourhood Plan (NP4Yaxham) Working Group Response to Breckland Local Plan consultation**

### **1) “Breckland Local Plan, Part 1 Preferred Directions”, December 2015 Specific response to selected policies and questions in.**

**Comments in this Section are provided on the following emerging policies:**

Preferred Policy Direction PD01 – Sustainable development in Breckland  
Preferred Policy Direction PD03 – Locational Strategy  
Preferred Policy Direction PD04 – Level and Location of Growth  
Preferred Policy Direction PD05 – Approach to Rural Areas  
Preferred Policy Direction PD08 – Social – Affordable Housing  
Preferred Policy Direction PD10 – Healthy Lifestyles  
Preferred Policy Direction ENV01 – Green Infrastructure  
Preferred Policy Direction ENV04 – Open Space, Sport & Recreation  
Preferred Policy Direction ENV05 – Protection and Enhancement of the Landscape  
Preferred Policy Direction ENV06 – Trees, Hedgerows and Development  
Preferred Policy Direction ENV07 – Designated Heritage Assets and  
ENV08 – Non-Statutory Heritage Assets  
Preferred Policy Direction – ENV09 Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage  
Preferred Policy Direction – E02 Employment Development Outside General Employment  
Areas  
Preferred Policy Direction – E03 Farm Diversification  
Preferred Policy Direction – E04 Tourism Related Development  
Preferred Policy Direction – E05 Telecommunications  
Preferred Policy Direction – E06 Developer Contributions  
Preferred Policy Direction – E07 Advertising and Signs  
Preferred Policy Direction – TR01 Sustainable Transport Network  
Preferred Policy Direction – COM01 Design  
Preferred Policy Direction – COM02 Protection of Amenity  
Preferred Policy Direction – COM03 Principles of New Housing  
Preferred Policy Direction – COM07 Residential Replacement, Extensions & Alterations  
Preferred Policy Direction – COM10 Affordable Housing Exceptions

## Detailed Emerging Policy Comments:

### Preferred Policy Direction PD01 – Sustainable development in Breckland

#### Q1 (P22) Response

Development is only sustainable when all supporting infrastructure is in place. Where are the benefits to the settled community if there is a lack of school places, restriction of access to GP services, insufficient road infrastructure, lack of hospital beds, stretched sewerage and surface water drainage facilities, as well as dire broadband and mobile phone coverage in some areas?

Many of these issues are not even mentioned in the Local Plan, despite being critical to the sustainability of the anticipated housing and economic growth set out. There is no suggestion of how these issues are to be addressed either now or in the near future or where issues are not in Breckland's gift, how Breckland will work with other authorities, organisations and stakeholders to achieve the growth in services and infrastructure that would make the Local Plan economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. **This is the number one issue that residents of Yaxham have raised with the Working Group in public meetings, consultation and drop-in events, and in questionnaire and survey responses.**

### Preferred Policy Direction PD03 – Locational Strategy

#### Q3 (P32) Response

Yaxham residents consider Yaxham to be a small rural village separate from Dereham, but significantly dependent on Dereham and other larger settlements for many services. It is therefore seen as artificial to designate the parish of Yaxham as a Local Service Centre. The parish has two very separate settlements. One has a school, the other has a shop. There is no longer a Post Office, the shop in Clint Green has an uncertain future following the recent death of its owner, and the only remaining pub/restaurant "The Mill" has been shut for some time and its future too is uncertain. Employment opportunities in the village are limited. Whilst there are some 40 businesses based and/or operating in Yaxham, they are predominantly farmers, sole traders and self-employed people working from home – with little or no prospect of additional employment. Indeed there is only one employer with more than a couple of full-time staff. The total population is only 760, split c. 460 in Yaxham and 230 in Clint Green (with the balance in the surrounding area). Through consultations, it has emerged that the village wishes remain small and rural with its Green Gap to enhance the local amenity.

**The Working Group on behalf of the community, for all the reasons set out, rejects the inclusion of Yaxham as a Service Centre and asks that it is removed from Table 3.3 and placed in the next tier of the settlement hierarchy as a village with settlement boundaries that is not a service centre – See PD05 Rural Areas below.**

## **Preferred Policy Direction PD04 – Level and Location of Growth**

### **Q4 (P41) Response**

The consultation within the village has made it clear that most residents recognise and accept that further development in the village is both inevitable and important in maintaining the vibrancy of the village community. The steady development within the village over recent decades demonstrates the willingness of the village to accept and absorb organic growth through infill, conversion of buildings and the redevelopment of brownfield land. With the exception of a few, the main responses to consultation have argued for the village to continue to develop and grow within its settlement boundaries as it has to date. There is therefore little comprehension as to the requirement through the Local Plan designating the village as a Service Centre to have a designated growth number – significantly in excess of the overall 14% set out in Options 1 and 2. Some settlements will be willing to accept more than the suggested numbers in Option 2, whilst others will more suitably absorb not as many. It would be for each community to decide rather than a “top-down” imposition in the Local Plan.

**On behalf of the village the NP4Yaxham Working Group therefore believes that Option 1 with no specific targets is the most appropriate for the rural villages.**

### **Supplementary Point of Concern – Three Tiers of Settlement Hierarchy – Settlement Boundaries**

In reviewing this proposed policy the NP4Y Working Group has grown increasingly concerned about the lack of any explicit statement as to the role of settlement boundaries as regards the three tiers of the sustainable settlement hierarchy, and particularly those of Local Service Centres, as this is the preferred designation for Yaxham. From paragraph 3.15 to 3.54 it appears implicit that settlement boundaries will be recognised, with a presumption that development will be within settlement boundaries – but at no point does it appear explicit. By contrast, in the section on Rural Areas outside the “sustainable settlement hierarchy” in PD05 “development concentrated... within the defined settlement boundary”. No such statement appears for settlements in the settlement hierarchy.

**NP4Yaxham Working Group therefore recommends that the Local Plan be amended to make explicit the role of settlement boundaries for settlements in the sustainable settlement hierarchy.**

## **Preferred Policy Direction PD05 – Approach to Rural Areas**

### **Q5 (P50) Response**

Whilst being in general agreement with PD05, as discussed under PD03 above, the residents of Yaxham do not understand how Yaxham is classified as a “Service Centre” and not classified as a “Rural Area”.

**Yaxham should therefore be included in the Rural Areas policy and classified within the group under the heading “New Residential and Employment Opportunities in Villages with Settlement Boundaries”.**

## **Preferred Policy Direction PD08 – Social – Affordable Housing**

### **Q8 (69) Response**

From consultation within the village, the positive reaction to affordable homes leads the Working Group to be broadly supportive of PD08. There are three issues that the Working Group asks that Breckland consider for this policy. These are:

- The differing numbers of existing affordable homes in different settlements. The parish of Yaxham has 44 homes currently classed as “affordable” or “social housing”. This is some 12% of the housing stock – similar to Breckland. However, in they are all in one of the two settlements i.e. in Yaxham and none in Clint Green. Yaxham settlement therefore has 20% of its housing stock as “affordable”, and if up to 45 homes are built on the land behind Elm Close, for which there is already outline permission, then a further 16 affordable homes could be added, bring the total by a third to 60 and the proportion to 23%. There is therefore the need to consider the total number of affordable homes in a settlement as well as in any one development, otherwise there is the risk that communities goodwill to affordable homes might diminish.
- Providing the facility for people with local connections to the parish where a new development is taking place have preference over those from the wider Breckland area. From village consultation this is very widely felt.
- Seeking in new developments that affordable homes tenure structures are created to be affordable homes in perpetuity. In this way keeping the new affordable homes available to those in the community who cannot afford properties in the open private market.

## **Preferred Policy Direction PD10 – Healthy Lifestyles**

### **Q10 (P76) Response**

A Health Impact Assessment, as requested by NHS England, should not only embrace aspects of health and wellbeing by enabling physical activity but also by the adequate provision of, and access to, adequate health services such as dental and GP surgeries. What is the definition of “large and complex” proposals in this context? An explicit definition is required.

## **Preferred Policy Direction ENV01 – Green Infrastructure**

### **Q14 (P89) Response**

The network of Green Infrastructure in the District should be safeguarded, retained and enhanced. The 2008 Green Infrastructure Study of the countryside in and around Dereham should be updated and incorporated into the Local Plan. It is felt essential that the green lung is retained and enhanced to promote the wellbeing not only of the wildlife but also the citizens.

From consultation in the village it has become clear that second only to concerns about the infrastructure required to support all the proposed new development, is the importance of retaining Yaxham as a clearly separate and significant community with its own small rural village identity. The village clearly values the proximity of Dereham to the north and of the larger village of Mattishall to the east – but most definitely does not wish to be absorbed in part or in whole in either.

The NP4Yaxham Working Group has therefore developed a “Strategic Green Gaps” Policy which has been well-received within the village – to identify the visual separation of these settlements. In most instances one settlement cannot see the other – and it is this openness and separate character that the village does not wish to be sacrificed. This emerging draft Policy is expanded upon section 3. The NP4Yaxham Working Group commends this to Breckland for consideration.

## **Preferred Policy Direction ENV04 – Open Space, Sport & Recreation**

### **Q17 (P100) Response**

Under the section “New Provision” there are two issues that the NP4Yaxham Working Group, based on consultation, asks Breckland to consider as regards small rural settlements such as Yaxham:

- most developments are likely to be less than 25 dwellings so there should be provision for proportionate off-site contributions to the local community’s open space, sport and recreation facilities; and
- that the penultimate paragraph of this policy the phrase “Contributions in lieu of on-site provision will be the exception and will need to be supported by robust evidence from the applicant that on-site provision is not preferable.” be amended so as not to apply to smaller rural village settlements such as Yaxham.

## **Preferred Policy Direction ENV05 – Protection and Enhancement of the Landscape**

### **Q19 (P108) Response**

The NP4Yaxham Working Group welcomes the statements Paragraph 7.63 “The Council will give high protection to the River Valleys and Chalk Rivers from development that would harm their defining landscape characteristics...” and Paragraph 7.65 “Breckland’s Landscape Character Assessment has previously identified river valleys as areas which should have high protection from development due to their important environmental quality. It is considered that this approach should continue within the Local Plan”,

We propose only one amendment in paragraph one of ENV 05 replacing “should” with “must” which would make the Policy even more explicit.

## **Preferred Policy Direction ENV06 – Trees, Hedgerows and Development**

### **Q20 (P110) Response**

Agreed – where possible all existing trees and specifically hedgerows native to the area should be retained as protection for local wildlife. Grubbing up and replacing with neat urban hedging would not reflect the local landscape character.

## Preferred Policy Direction ENV07 – Designated Heritage Assets and ENV08 Non-Statutory Heritage Assets

### Questions 20 & 21 (PP112 and 113) Response

ENV07, Question 20, P112 – agreed

ENV08, Question 21, P113, Non-Statutory Heritage Assets policy – agreed, with a couple of suggestions for Breckland to consider:

- “unknown” in the first line of the first paragraph would we believe more accurately read “non-designated” as per paragraph 7.84; and
- Whilst the policy appears to relate solely to the buildings, we would argue that it should cover development in the vicinity of these non-statutory heritage assets, as it is one thing to protect the building but that development close by may well effectively undermine the heritage nature of the asset.

## Preferred Policy Direction – ENV09 Flood Risk and Surface Water Drainage Q23 (P115) Response

Sustainable drainage (SUDS) would appear severely compromised by the type of soil and the capacity of Anglian Water facilities at both Dereham and Mattishall. This has resulted in a major local site relying on multiple “honey carts” to service the whole site every day. The same appears true of new housing development in Norwich Road Dereham where the promised sewerage and surface drainage facilities were not in operation before the first new residents moved in.

This is not only unsustainable in modern times with an increasing number of cess pit emptying vehicles causing noise and disturbance to residents and adding these vehicles to traffic in towns and villages but there must also be the possibility of toxic waste going onto agricultural fields. What do the modern washing powders contain?

The flood risk to river valleys and low lying fields is inherently greater not only due to climate change but also to inadequate surface water drainage from new developments following ditches into neglected rivers.

New development should follow sustainable drainage systems and Breckland Council should absolutely ensure that Anglian Water has adequate capacity.

NP4Yaxham Working Group strongly believes that before the first occupation of any new dwellings on a development there should be sustainable infrastructure in place to ensure adequate provision:

- To minimise fluvial and surface/water flood risk that protects the local environment and rivers from contamination from urban run-off
- For the supplies of potable water
- For sewerage provision that is designed to protect the local environment and rivers from contamination, with mains drainage being the preferred option where practicable

## **Preferred Policy Direction – E02 Employment Development Outside General Employment Areas**

### **Q26 (P124) Response**

Agreed – in tune with local feedback, particularly as regards

- “not adversely affect the type and volume of traffic”; and
- “The authority will consider the need for appropriate measures in order to maintain the visual appearance and architectural character of buildings and prevent the proliferation of buildings in the countryside.”

## **Preferred Policy Direction – E03 Farm Diversification**

### **Q27 (P125) Response**

Agreed – in tune with local feedback.

## **Preferred Policy Direction – E04 Tourism Related Development**

### **Q28 (P125) Response**

Agreed – in tune with local feedback, with particular reference to:

- “Smaller scale development proposals should be of a suitable scale, and type to protect the character of the townscape and landscape”; and
- “Camping and caravan sites will be supported where there is an unmet need. Proposals should be small in scale to limit impact on landscape and amenity and utilise, or be well related to, existing rural buildings”.

## **Preferred Policy Direction – E05 Telecommunications**

### **Q29 (P129) Response**

In so far as this policy goes it is fine. It however leaves open a number of pressing issues:

- The very poor mobile communications within Breckland and particularly small rural locations such as Yaxham. Without decent mobile telecommunications the capacity for rural enterprise to develop and prosper is very limited.
- All new developments above a certain size should be required to provide mobile telecommunications for the new dwellings, which would also benefit the local community.
- No mention is made of Broadband which clearly sits within telecommunications. All new dwellings on developments should be required to connect to super-fast broadband.

## Preferred Policy Direction – E06 Developer Contributions

### Q30 (P132) Response

Based on community feedback and recent experience, the policy is to be supported in so far as it goes, and particularly the recognition of “made Neighbourhood Plans”. However, the policy omits a number of key issues:

- Education – the assumption appears that the County will set education requirements. This ignores
  - o the major role of the Diocese of Norwich Board of Education which has responsibility for many schools including the Primary School in Yaxham,
  - o the role of the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia, and
  - o the growing number of schools that have become academies and any new Free Schools all of which do not come under the aegis of the County Council,

The Local Plan needs to take account of the diverse education provision and provide a mechanism for developer contributions to take account of this. In Yaxham, the money from the first development recently to provide s106 contributions is going to Dereham 6<sup>th</sup> Form College rather than the local primary school to provide primary places for local children – directly contrary to residents’ wishes.

- Key infrastructure requirements such as GP surgeries and sewerage provision.

**The NP4Yaxham Working group asks that these issues be considered in this policy.**

## Preferred Policy Direction – E07 Advertising and Signs

### Q31 (P133) Response

The policy is to be supported, again as far as it goes. It is unclear whether this covers lighted signage or lighting that plays a role in advertising a site. The village feedback is very supportive of Breckland’s “Dark Skies” policy and is therefore concerned that no new signs or lighting are introduced that may threaten the “Dark Skies” over Breckland in general and Yaxham in particular.

**The NP4Yaxham Working group asks that this issue be considered in this policy.**

## Preferred Policy Direction – TR01 Sustainable Transport Network

### Q32 (P134) Response

Better to accept and manage the road infrastructure as it is in Norfolk. Trying to reduce private car use is admirable, but ultimately useless as the buses, although greatly improved, do not go to all places, at all times. People are well used to the independence offered by their cars and now travel distances to work, to get to school and to surgeries and hospitals.

There needs to be positive investment in more cycle-ways and safe footpaths and then perhaps people may be persuaded to leave their cars at home. Roads such as B1135 are currently too dangerous to walk or cycle in places so a car is vital. Breckland, NCC and developers’ S106 or CIL obligations should take this into account simply for the health and wellbeing of residents and to encourage them to get out of their cars.

## Preferred Policy Direction – COM01 Design

### Q33 (P136) Response

Agreed in principle. All the aspects which are listed should be taken into account and new developments should take the latest design best practice into consideration. This is particularly important with infill development in village settings.

## Preferred Policy Direction – COM02 Protection of Amenity

### Q34 (P139) Response

Agreed – and in order to protect the general amenity, housing density should not be compromised. There should be space enough for waste and recycling bins at the side of properties, and garages wide enough to open the car doors so they are not simply used as extra storage space leaving more cars parked on the road. **More generous space allocation for the above would enhance the outside living environment.**

## Preferred Policy Direction – COM03 Principles of New Housing

### Q35 (P142) Response

Agreed in principle – however the reference to “Parking Standards in Appendix 3” states that all that is required is a minimum of two spaces per dwelling. From village consultation it is clear that there is a strong support for requiring sufficient off-street car-parking for new dwellings, and that this is proportionate to the different size and type of properties. The curse of on-street parking clutters the rural settlement environment. A 2-bedroom property may not have the same car-parking requirements as a 3-bed or 4-bed property. **The policy should be amended to show a minimum of off-street parking places proportionate to the number of likely residents per dwelling.**

## Preferred Policy Direction – COM07 Residential Replacement, Extensions & Alterations

### Q39 (P151) Response

Agreed in principle. We would add to the Listed Buildings reference in the final sentence “Non-listed Heritage Assets”, as these have a major role to play in the local character and environment.

## Preferred Policy Direction – COM10 Affordable Housing Exceptions

### Q42 (P154) Response

What is the definition of “local” in this context? Is it truly for people from the actual town or village where the new development is proposed? In any event, the community needs to retain a balance in terms not only of housing but also of the population.

## 2) Comments on “Breckland Local Plan, Part 2 – Emerging Site Options”, December 2015, as they affect the civil parish of Yaxham

It is not the role of the NP4Yaxham Working Group to take a view one way or another on the five nominated sites within the parish – three in Yaxham and two in Clint Green – and the array of sites nominated on the south side of Dereham outside the Parish of Yaxham. However, as part of the local consultation process there has been much discussion of the nominated sites. The major feedback has been how such development can take place without plans to address the infrastructure issues. Such comments are not site specific and are covered in the responses to the emerging plans in section 1) of this submission.

As to specific sites:

### a) Sites within the Parish of Yaxham

The bulk of the feedback has related to the two sites in Clint Green. LP[113]004 “Reasonable Alternative” and LP[113]003 “Unreasonable Alternative”. There is frank disbelief that the recorded view for LP[113]004 “The SHLAA 2015 update determined this site to be 'non-developable' due to the severe highways constraints.” has been ignored. This is because that statement directly reflects the local views of the highway at this location. There are two major highway points put by local residents in their feedback to NP4Yaxham. The proposed access from Norwich Road is on what is already regarded as nasty blind-bend only metres to the west of the access to Paper Street. The Paper Street/Norwich Road junction is already a challenging junction for traffic emerging onto Norwich Road. The idea that cars related to up to 35 properties emerging only metres to its west only strikes dismay into the users of Paper Street. There is associated great concern that if 004 is accepted as “Reasonable” then this could provide access to 003 which could then be seen as “Reasonable” and thereby exacerbating the concerns already felt about 004

In Yaxham itself there is recognition that LP[113]005 already has outline planning permission. The main concern here is density and addressing sewerage and surface-water run-off issues. There is no support in Yaxham recorded in the consultation for the sites LP[113]001 and 002 to be considered “Reasonable” as the highway issues would be seen to rule these out.

### b) Sites south side of Dereham

There are some nine sites indicated as “Reasonable Alternatives” which may cumulatively add up to potential more than 1,500 new homes. **The general village reaction is that this is completely unacceptable as it significantly encroaches on the rural Tud River Valley bringing ever closer the risk of Yaxham being subsumed into Dereham as a suburb – losing its identity.** This point is expanded on in the rationale for the Green Gap Policy in section 3 below.

**3) NP4Yaxham's emerging draft Strategic Green Gaps Policy for Breckland  
to consider in the context of the Local Plan**

*Attached*