6 Key Rural Centres Options

Phase 1: Initial Assessment of Rural Settlements

To determine which rural settlements could accommodate housing growth and act as rural service centres, the settlements were first categorised, based on their function and number of services available. Settlements were categorised as Key Service Centres if they had populations over 1500 people and contained a primary school, local shop, post office, GP, community/leisure facilities, employment and an hourly 6 day a week bus service (See Appendix 5). Based on this criteria the following settlements have been designated as Key Rural Centres:

- Barlestone
- Desford
- Groby
- Market Bosworth
- Markfield & Field Head
- Newbold Verdon
- Ratby
- Stoke Golding
- Bagworth
- Thornton

Key Service Centres that provide localised provision of facilities permit access by foot, bike and local bus and can minimise car journeys not only for those people living in the Service Centres, but also the rural hamlets surrounding these centres. The were two anomalies in the Key Rural Centre classification. One was Bagworth & Thornton. Whilst these villages have the population to support the above services, very few services have materialised, despite significant housing growth in Bagworth. As a cluster however, they are very well located in terms of employment provision with Merrylees industrial estate and Interlink Industrial Park in close proximity and there is a shop and primary school located in Thornton. The purpose of designating these villages as Key Rural Centres is to assist in securing services to ensure this cluster fulfils its potential. The second anomaly is Barlestone, which does not have any employment provision, despite having the population and services one would expect from a Key Rural Centre. Encouraging employment in Barlestone is therefore a key objective.

Phase 2: Detailed Assessment of Key Rural Centres

The Key Rural Centres identified currently have limited capacity for in-fill development, therefore, any additional growth would require a redefining of the settlement boundary. This work will be undertaken as part of the Site Allocations DPD, however, an initial analysis into the constraints around the key rural centres was undertaken to determine whether additional development was feasible.

Similarly to the urban extensions work, each centre was initially assessed against a range of environmental, social and economic sustainability criteria set out in the sustainability appraisal (See Appendix 2). More detailed work was then undertaken to assess the nature of key built and natural constraints (again using the red and orange constraints identified in above in Phase 1 of the urban extensions analysis). This section briefly outlines the reasons why development may or may not be appropriate for each of the Key Rural Centres identified. Each of the Key Rural Centres are grouped according the Landscape Character Area they fall into, with a description of the constraints and opportunities for each landscape character area preceding the individual settlement analysis. Maps identifying constraints are included at the back of the report in Appendix 3.

Charnwood Fringe Character Area

The Hinckley & Bosworth Landscape Character Assessment (2006) states that this area is a 'sometimes dramatic landscape influenced by Charnwood Forest to the north and views towards the urban area of Leicester to the east. A strong distinctive character which is generally of high sensitivity with limited capacity for change. The main settlements are the villages of Groby, Ratby and Markfield which have recently expanded to accommodate new development. These villages still exhibit locally distinctive characteristics, especially as a result of their 'organic' settlement cores and the frequent use of local stone as building material.

Groby

- A wide range of existing services, facilities and employment are provided in Groby and nearby in west Leicester, however, need to consider whether new services (eg. Healthcare, schools, shopping, leisure facilities) may be required to accommodate any increase in population.
- Development likely to have an adverse effect upon local ecology as the Groby Pool SSSI lies to the north and there are a number of ecology sites surrounding the settlement, including Martinshaw Wood which abuts the settlement to the south west. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Land surrounding Groby is designated as green wedge. Development of these areas should be avoided to ensure Ratby and Groby retain their separate identities.
- Development may affect the Groby Castle Scheduled Ancient Monument and the Groby Conservation Area. Need to ensure development is designed sensitively and in keeping with the surrounding areas.
- The west of Groby is within the National Forest and there are some areas of woodland surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in these sites.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg Rothley Brook). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency guidelines.

- Land to the north of Groby is in the floodplain. Development in the floodplain should be avoided. To the north there is also a large mineral extraction site.
- Groby is bounded to the north by the A 50 and to the east by the A46, both of which present a significant barrier to development.
- The historic Conservation Area core is highly sensitive and has little capacity to accommodate change.
- There is an area of Grade 2 agricultural land to the south west of the settlement.
- The Hinckley & Bosworth Landscape Character Assessment (2006) states that due to the firm defensible boundary provided by the A50 and A46 there is little scope for further growth at Groby.

Due to these constraints, it is considered Groby only has limited potential for development. However, there may be scope to amend the settlement boundary to allow limited development on the edge of the existing urban area. This will be investigated through the site allocations DPD.

Ratby

- Some existing services (eg. Sports pavilion), but no secondary school. There are secondary schools in nearby Groby and west Leicester. Need to consider whether new services (eg. Healthcare, schools, shopping, leisure facilities) may be required to accommodate any increase in population.
- Development likely to have an adverse effect upon local ecology as there is an area of Ancient Woodland surrounding the settlement as well as some ecology sites. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Land to the east and the south of Ratby is designated as green wedge. Development in these areas should be avoided to ensure Ratby retains its separate identity.
- The west of Ratby is within the National Forest and there are some areas of woodland surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in these sites.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg. Rothley Brook). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency guidelines.
- Land to the south and south-west of Ratby is in the floodplain. Development in the floodplain should be avoided.
- The close proximity to the M1 may encourage residents to travel by car.
- There are a number of employment sites in Ratby and west Leicester.
- The diverse compact historic core is highly sensitive and has little capacity to successfully assimilate significant development.
- The open landscape to the west and south plays an important role in providing a rural context to the historic core.

Ratby is bounded to the north by the M1 which presents a significant barrier to development. To the south and south east, there is a 100 year flood plain

which also limits development. The only opportunity for development is therefore to the west of the settlement although this plays an important role in providing a rural context to the historic core.

Due to these constraints, it is considered Groby only has limited potential for development. However, there may be scope to amend the settlement boundary to allow limited development on the edge of the existing urban area. This will be investigated through the site allocations DPD.

Markfield & Field Head

- Contains a wide range of existing services (including a Community and Sports Centre in Markfield), however need to consider whether new services (eg. Healthcare, schools, shopping, leisure facilities) may be required to accommodate any increase in population.
- Markfield Quarry to the west of the settlement is an important centre of climbing and sub-aqua.
- There are a number of ecology sites surrounding the settlement and Markfield Quarry, to the west of the settlement, is of ecological and geological interest. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Development may affect the Markfield Conservation Area and its setting.
- Land to the west is currently designated as a local landscape improvement area, and this presents opportunities to significantly improve the quality of the landscape in this location, through measures such as landscaping, tree planting and screening.
- Markfield and Field Head are within the National Forest. Need to ensure no woodland is lost.
- The diverse historic core is highly sensitive and has little capacity to successfully assimilate significant development.
- Open space linkages, particularly to the west, are of importance to the context of the village.
- The close proximity to the M1 may encourage residents to travel by car.

Markfield & Field Head is bounded by the A50 to the south which presents a significant barrier to development. To the east of the settlement is lawn wood, a mineral extraction site. There is also a small mineral extraction site to the north of the settlement between the A50 and the settlement boundary. To the west of the settlement there is a large recreation site which limits the potential for development. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be opportunity for development to the south of Markfield and Fieldhead, although this would breach the defensible boundary of London Road. This will be further investigated through the Site Allocations DPD.

Forest Hills Character Area

The Landscape Character Assessment states that the Forest Hill Character Area in which Bagworth, Thornton, Newbold Verdon and Barlestone is situated is a changing landscape of lesser sensitivity due to the large areas of new woodland planting and extensive restoration schemes which have yet to mature. Opportunities exist within the landscape for continuing improvement to existing settlements and their settings.

Bagworth & Thornton

- Some services are provided, but the lack of a GP and secondary school in both villages, the lack of a post office in Thornton and the lack of a supermarket in Bagworth could impact upon the suitability of these sites. There are secondary schools in nearby Markfield and Desford.
- The location provides good access to the Moat Scheduled Ancient Monument in Bagworth Park and Thornton Reservoir, however, development may affect the Moat Scheduled Ancient Monument and its setting.
- Thornton Reservoir SSSI is located adjacent to the east side of Thornton. There are also a number of ecology sites surrounding the settlements. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Bagworth and Thornton are within the National Forest. Ensure no woodland is lost.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg. Thornton Reservoir). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency Guidelines.
- Most residents are likely to work further afield and will need to commute by car.

Thornton

To the east of Thornton is the Thornton reservoir as well as numerous parish ecology sites. To the south west of Thornton, there is 100 year flood plain which development would need to avoid. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be limited potential to accommodate some additional development to the south west of Thornton. This will be investigated further through the Site Allocations DPD.

Bagworth

Bagworth has limited constraints surrounding the existing settlement boundary. There are a number of open spaces/recreation facilities outside the settlement boundary that will need to be protected including Bagworth Hill to the east of the town. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development in Bagworth. This will be investigated further through the site allocations DPD.

Newbold Verdon

- Existing services are provided in Newbold Verdon, including a supermarket, primary school, GP and post office. However the lack of a secondary school could impact upon the suitability of this site. Need to consider whether new services may be required to accommodate any increase in population
- The location provides good access to Newbold Verdon Hall and Newbold Verdon Conservation Area.
- There are a number of ecological sites surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Newbold Verdon Hall is a Grade 1 Listed Building and any new development nearby must be designed sensitively.
- There are some areas of woodland surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in these sites.
- Most residents are likely to work further afield than Newbold Verdon and will need to commute by car, although a good bus service to Leicester is provided.
- The Conservation Area core of the village is highly sensitive and retains its relationship with the open countryside to the west. This should be protected and enhanced.

Newbold Verdon is surrounded by Grade 2 agricultural land to the north, north west and east which limits development in these areas. The Conservation Area core of the village is highly sensitive and retains its relationship with the open countryside to west which should be retained. Therefore the only area suitable for development would be to the south west of the settlement. A Sewage farm is located around this area and appropriate mitigation would be required, as is a gravel extraction site. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development around Newbold Verdon. This will be determined through the Site Allocations DPD.

Barlestone

- Existing services in Barlestone, include a supermarket, primary school, leisure facilities and post office. However, the lack of secondary school could impact upon the suitability of the site. Need to consider whether new services will be required to accommodate any increase in population.
- The nearest secondary school is in Market Bosworth.
- The location provides good access to Areas of Special Character within Settlements, but development may affect these areas – it must be designed sensitively and in keeping with the surrounding area.
- There are a number of ecology sites surrounding Barlestone. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Employment sites are limited in Barlestone; most residents are likely to work further afield. However, development may help to improve the rural economy.

There is a 100 yr flood plain to the south of Barlestone. In addition there are a number of ecology sites again to the south of Barlestone as well as open space/ recreation sites. There is also some grade 2 agricultural land to the west of the settlement. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development around Barlestone to the North & South of the Settlement. The exact location of this will be determined through the Site Allocations DPD.

Market Bosworth Parkland Character Area

The Landscape Character Assessment states that this is a 'strong, distinctive and diverse character area resulting in high sensitivity and restricted capacity to absorb change. Market Bosworth has significant popular appeal. It is important to protect and enhance the landscape setting of Market Bosworth, including open land which penetrates the town and ensure that new development does not erode the rural context of the town.

Market Bosworth

- A wide range of existing services are provided in Market Bosworth. However, need to consider whether new healthcare and leisure facilities will be required to accommodate any increase in population.
- The location provides good access to the Market Bosworth Conservation Area and the Roman foundations Scheduled Ancient Monument. However, development may affect the Market Bosworth Conservation Area and its setting.
- There are a number of ecology sites surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- There are some areas of woodland surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in these sites.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg. Ashby Canal). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency Guidelines.
- The rural setting of the town is particularly important, and highly sensitive to change. Fingers of green open land which penetrate towards the market place should be retained and enhanced.
- Most residents are likely to work further afield and will need to commute by car.

There is a scheduled ancient monument to the east of the settlement as well as Bosworth Park, an important area of open space. To the south of the settlement there are a number of open spaces that would need to be protected. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development around Market Bosworth to the south of the settlement. However, this would need to be carefully designed to ensure the landscape setting of Market Bosworth is retained, including the open land which penetrates the town and that the conservation area is not harmed. This will be investigated further through the Site Allocations DPD.

Desford Vales Character Area

The Landscape Character Assessment states that this is a 'predominantly rural landscape occasionally influenced by development features, isolated quarries and industrial areas. This results in a landscape of varied sensitivity and capacity to accommodate change.

Desford

- A wide range of existing services are provided in Desford, (eg. Bosworth Community College) however need to consider whether new services (eg. Healthcare, schools, shopping and leisure facilities) will be required to accommodate the increased population.
- Land to the south of Desford is currently designated as an Area of Separation. Development in this area should be avoided.
- Development may affect the Desford Conservation Area and its setting. The historic conservation area core of Desford is sensitive and has limited ability to accommodate change. Need to ensure development is designed sensitively an in keeping with the surrounding area.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg. Rothley Brook). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency guidelines.

To the south and west of the settlement there are large areas of grade 2 agricultural land which constrains development in these areas. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development around Desford to the south east and east of the settlement. This will be investigated further through the Site Allocations DPD.

Stoke Golding Vales Character Area

The Landscape Character Assessment states that this area is of high sensitivity, with limited capacity for change. Stoke Golding is an attractive settlement clustered around its prominent church close to the Ashby Canal.

Stoke Golding

- A wide range of existing services are provided in Stoke Golding. However, need to consider whether new services (eg. Healthcare, schools, shopping, leisure facilities) will need to be provided if there is to be additional population.
- The location provides good access to Bosworth Historic Battlefield and the Ashby Canal Conservation Area.
- Bosworth Battlefield is located to the north of the settlement and the Ashby Canal Conservation Area is located to the west. Need to ensure the development is designed sensitively and in keeping with the surrounding area.

- There are a number of ecology sites surrounding the settlement. Need to avoid development in or adjacent to these sites.
- Development has the potential to impact upon local water bodies (eg. Ashby Canal). Need to ensure such impacts are minimised by following Environment Agency guidelines.
- Employment sites are limited so most residents are likely to work outside Stoke Golding and will need to commute by car. Need to ensure that public transport linkages are provided to minimise car travel. However, development may help to improve the rural economy.

To the west of the settlement there is a 100 year flood plain which would limit development in this area. In addition, the whole north western area abutting the settlement boundary is a conservation area. There is also Grade 2 agricultural land to the north of the settlement and a scheduled ancient monument to the south of the settlement. Having regard to the location and scale of constraints, there may be potential to accommodate some additional development around Stoke Golding to the south and south east of the settlement. This will be investigated further through the Site Allocations DPD.

Phase 3: Accessibility of Key Rural Centres

Phase 3 of the study focused on accessibility to services in the Key Rural Centres.

The following issues were investigated:

- Accessibility to Services/Facilities
    - Hospitals
    - Health Centres
    - Town Centres
    - Local Shops
    - Post Offices
    - Primary Schools
    - Secondary Schools
    - Open Space

- Accessibility to Employment sites

- Accessibility to public transport (see White Young Green Transport Assessment 2007 available from www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk)

(see Appendix 4)

Groby

Groby is well located for access to primary schools with the majority of the settlement and the surrounding area within the 600 m buffer zone. It is also well located for access to secondary schools with the settlement and

surrounding area within the 1500 m buffer zone. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is well located for access to GP's, with the settlement and surrounding area within the 1000m buffer zone. It is well located in terms of access to Leicester City and to local shops and post offices. There is an existing employment site to the west of the site. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development were to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Ratby

Ratby is well located for access to primary schools with the majority of the settlement and the surrounding area within the 600 m buffer zone. It is also well located for access to secondary schools with the settlement and surrounding area within the 1500 m buffer zone. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is well located for access to GP's, with the settlement and surrounding area within the 1000m buffer zone. It is well located in terms of access to Leicester City and to local shops and post offices. There are a number of existing employment sites. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Markfield

Markfield is well located for access to primary schools with the majority of the settlement and the surrounding area within the 600 m buffer zone. However there is no secondary school within the 1500 m buffer zone, although South Charnwood High School is not far outside the buffer. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is well located for access to GP's, with the settlement and surrounding area within the 1000m buffer zone. It is reasonably well located in terms of access to Leicester City and is well located for access to local shops and post offices. There are a number of existing employment sites. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Thornton

Thornton is well located for access to primary schools with the majority of the settlement and the surrounding area within the 600 m buffer zone. However there is no secondary school within the 1500 m buffer zone. It is not well located for access to hospitals or to GP's. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres or a post office but is well located for access to local shops. There is good access to existing employment sites, being reasonably close to Bardon Hill and Merrylees Industrial Estate. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Bagworth

Bagworth is not well located for access to primary or secondary schools as it is outside the 600m buffer zone for primary schools and 1500 m buffer zone for secondary schools. It is not well located for access to hospitals or to GP's. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, local shops. There is good access to Bardon Hill Industrial estate. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Newbold Verdon

Newbold Verdon is well located for access to primary schools, but is outside the 1500 buffer zone for secondary schools. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but does have a GP. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, but is well located for local shops and a post office. It has a small existing employment site. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Barlestone

Barlestone is well located for access to primary schools, but is outside the 1500 buffer zone for secondary schools. From 11, most children transfer to Market Bosworth High School. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is within the 1000m buffer zone for access to GP's. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, or employment but is well located for local shops and a post office. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Market Bosworth

Market Bosworth is well located for access to primary and secondary schools. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is within the 1000m buffer zone for access to GP's. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, but is well located for local shops and a post office. It has existing employment sites. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Desford

Desford is well located for access to primary and secondary schools. It is not well located for access to hospitals, but is within the 1000m buffer zone for access to GP's. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, but is well located for local shops and a post office. It has no existing employment sites within the village but is very close to Caterpillar employment site. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

Stoke Golding

Stoke Golding is well located for access to primary schools, but is outside the 1500m buffer zone for secondary schools (although there is a private secondary school within the buffer). It is not well located for access to hospitals, but does have a GP. It is not well located in terms of access to Town Centres, but is well located for local shops and a post office. It has no existing employment sites. It has a number of open spaces, although if any development to was to be allowed, additional open space may be required.

The following table summarises the ranking for each topic area

	Primary School	Secondary School	Hospitals	Health Centres	Town Centres	Local Shops	Post Offices	Employment	Open Space
Groby	A	A	C	A	A	A	A	A	B
Ratby	A	A	C	A	A	A	A	A	B
Markfield & Field Head	A	B	C	A	A	A	A	A	B
Thornton	A	C	C	C	C	A	C	B	B
Bagworth	C	C	C	C	C	C	A	A	B
Newbold Verdon	A	C	C	A	C	A	A	B	B
Barlestone	A	C	C	A	C	A	A	C	B
Market Bosworth	A	A	C	A	C	A	A	A	B
Desford	A	A	C	A	C	A	A	A	B
Stoke Golding	A	B	C	A	C	A	A	C	B

Groby 7 A, 1 B, 1 C
Ratby: 7 A, 1 B, 1 C
Markfield: 6 A, 2B, 1 C
Thornton: 2 A, 2B, 5C
Bagworth: 2 A, 1B, 6 C
Newbold Verdon: 4A, 2B, 3C
Barleston: 4A, 1B, 4C
Market Bosworth: 6A, 1B, 2C
Desford: 6A, 1B, 2C
Stoke Golding: 4A, 2B, 3C

In terms of accessibility, Groby and Ratby have the most access to services followed by Markfield, Market Bosworth, Desford, Barlestone, Newbold Verdon, Stoke Golding, Thornton & Bagworth.

Distribution of Development in the Rural Areas

There are two main options in terms of distributing development within the Key Rural Centres, either to focus development on a limited number of Key Rural Centres or to distribute development amongst the 10 Key Rural Centres.

The following tables summarise the pros and cons of each option

Focus Development on limited number of Key Rural Centres

Pros	Cons
Economies of Scale- more improvements to local infrastructure & services	Adding significant development would have significant impact on character & identity of settlements
Centres act as a strong hub for surrounding areas	Change relationship of settlement to surrounding area and existing settlements
Potential to enhance employment mix	Does not allow for development in any other settlement- could result in other settlements stagnating
Potential for improved public transport	Would not provide for affordable housing across the rural centres, although this could be addressed through rural exception sites
	Significant impact on landscape character of surrounding areas

Focus development across the 10 Key Rural Centres

Pros	Cons
Less impact on settlement character and local identity	Smaller economies of scale- less improvements to infrastructure and services
More equitable distribution across the borough- more opportunity to provide affordable housing across the settlements	Less potential for improved public transport
More opportunity to maintain services across settlements	Fewer opportunities to enhance employment mix.
Less impact on landscape character/environment	

Conclusion

The Council's vision for rural areas is based on maintaining existing services (and where possible improving them) whilst minimising the impact of development on the rural areas. The option of focusing development in a small number of Key Rural Centres, rather than distributing it amongst the

Key Rural Centres does not accord with this vision and is therefore not the preferred distribution choice.

In relation to distributing growth amongst the Key Rural Centres, the assessment of Key Rural Centres indicates that Groby and Ratby have the largest number of natural and built constraints.

Out of the other 8 Key Rural Centres, Bagworth has the least constraints, however, it is also the settlement with the lowest accessibility levels. The focus for Bagworth therefore is to create a community heart for the village, with a subsequent increase in service provision. In terms of National statistics (Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Community Profile 2005), part of Twycross and Witherley Ward and part of Ambien ward are ranked within the 10% most deprived areas in relation to housing and services deprivation, therefore additional service provision for these wards is a priority. The Key Service Centres within or near these areas are Market Bosworth and Stoke Golding.

A limited number of dwellings are to be accommodated within the Key Rural Centres, this number will be determined through the Core Strategy. How this development is distributed will be determined through the Site Allocations DPD.

Distributing growth in this manner will not result in large scale improvements in services, however, it will have less impact on settlement identity and setting and will allow for natural population growth in these settlements to support the existing services. Where gaps have been identified in service provision (see Appendix 5), developers will be expected to contribute to their provision as part of any housing development.