

Introduction

Under the new planning system the district council is required to collect an appropriate range of background facts and figures as an evidence base, and then present these to the community so that we can work together to develop a set of issues and realistic options relevant to Forest Heath.

The following key facts are arranged in the same order of topic headings as in Document 1 and the response form, but starting with the spatial strategy because potentially all the facts can be used to inform the vision.

Core Spatial Strategy

Brownfield Development

In the six years between 1998 and 2004 the average proportion of new dwellings built on previously developed land (PDL) was 59%. This is the 2nd

highest proportion of Suffolk districts. It is just below the national target of 60%.

However, there is likely to be a downturn in the future as the largely greenfield development at Red Lodge is built.

The Watermark project being promoted by developers between Kentford and Red Lodge is proposing residential development of up to 5,000 dwellings on 108 hectares of greenfield land.

There is limited long-term potential - only 29% of the sites over 0.3 hectares identified in the urban capacity study were brownfield. Further details are set out below

Settlement of	Brownfield (ha)	Greenfield (ha)	Total (ha)	Number sites
NEWMARKET	3.47	11.82	15.29	9
MILDENHALL	5.28	10.04	15.32	11
BRANDON	12.11	11.52	23.63	17
LAKENHEATH	13.92	2.96	16.88	19
RED LODGE	10.42	75.82	86.24	9
BECK ROW	2.07	2.43	4.5	6
EXNING	0.05	0.30	0.35	1
KENTFORD	0	0	0	0
Totals	47.32 hectares	114.89 hectares	162.21 hectares	72
Assume a density of 32 dwellings per hectare 'best fit constrained (realistic) capacity'	1,514 dwellings	3,676 dwellings	5,191 dwellings	

Sustainability assessment of the towns and sustainable villages in Forest Heath

The following is an assessment of the sustainability of the towns and sustainable villages relative to one another. In other words, to rank each of the nine settlements relative to each other to assess the most sustainable and the least sustainable settlements.

The eight sustainability indicators listed below are based on those used in background studies for the

preparation of the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001. The background study was prepared for Suffolk County Council by Land Use Consultants and is dated April 1998. The indicators provide an assessment of which settlements show the greatest sustainability advantages (ie, the greatest potential for self-containment)

Sustainability indicators used to assess Forest Heath settlements

Indicator	Purpose of the Indicator
Population size 2001 census.	Potential for self-containment – the larger a settlement, the greater the potential for it to support the full range of employment and community facilities.
Unemployment rate 2001 census. Claimant unemployed as a percentage of economically active population of working age.	A measure of the health of the local economy – towns showing a low unemployment rate are considered to offer greater opportunities for housing to be located where the jobs are likely to be available.
Residents working in settlement. 2001 daytime population of an area as a percentage of the economically active population in an area.	Settlements showing a high ratio of employment in the settlement compared to the resident workforce offer greater opportunities for locating people closer to their place of employment. Settlements with a low proportion of people working in the town in which they live exhibit commuter settlement characteristics.
Proportion using sustainable transport to work 2001, as a percentage of working residents of the area except those working at home.	Towns with a high proportion of people using sustainable modes of transport (i.e. walking, cycling, public transport) to get to work are already providing attractive alternatives to the car.
Percentage of people living within 400m of a local shop and a primary school.	The opportunity of people to access community facilities by walking or cycling, rather than using a car.
Presence of a state upper school.	This indicates whether pupils have to travel to another town in order to go to school, which can have an effect on the number of car journeys made.
Presence of a doctor's surgery.	Proximity of a settlement's population to essential community facilities.
Presence of a hospital.	Proximity of a settlement's population to essential community facilities.

Rankings based on the number of settlements were applied to each sustainability indicator. The settlement ranked highest under an indicator scored nine and the settlement ranked lowest scored one. If two settlements are ranked the same they are given the same score. The scores for subsequent settlements are adjusted to reflect this. The scores under each sustainability indicator were totalled for each settlement. The highest score that any settlement could get is eight (Indicators) x nine (settlements) = 72. Limited significance should be attached to the individual scores. The strength of the analysis is that it allows for a transparent and objective comparison to be made between settlements.

Overall sustainability scores of the Forest Heath settlements

RANKING	SETTLEMENT	TOTAL SCORE
1	Newmarket	63
2	Mildenhall	51
3	Brandon	44
4	Beck Row	39
5	Lakenheath	38
6	Exning	37
7	Kentford	36.5
8	West Row	33
9	Red Lodge	31.5

Brownfield

The Forest Heath Urban Capacity Study 2003 identified 231 sites within the existing development boundaries of the three towns and the sustainable villages with the potential to provide a total of around 5,900 new dwellings.

However, because of the rural character of our towns and villages, 70% of these sites are greenfield and only 30% brownfield.

Economic Development, Retail and Tourism

The Evidence

Number of Jobs

According to the journey to work census data there were around 32,000 full and part-time jobs in the District in 2001. That is around 4,000 more jobs than resident workers. 69% of Forest Heath residents worked within the District in 2001.

Unemployment

At January 2004, unemployment in the District was 1.2%. This is below the averages for Suffolk, the east of England and the whole of England.

Economic Activity

The proportion of people within the 16-74 age group who are in some form of work (economically active) is significantly higher than the average for both the east of England and the whole of England.

Number of Businesses in the District

The number of businesses registered for VAT in the District increased from 2,045 in 2000 to 2,165 in 2004, an increase of 6%.

Occupation Groups

The proportion of people working as managers, in professional occupations and administrative or secretarial occupations is below the average for Suffolk, the east of England and the whole of England. Conversely, the proportion working as plant and machine operatives and in elementary occupations (unskilled labourers) is higher than the averages for the east of England and the whole of England.

Average Weekly Earnings

There are no reliable figures for the District. However, given that the District has a high proportion of unskilled jobs and the fact that the average Suffolk wage is below the national average, it is likely that the weekly wage in Forest Heath will be below the averages for Suffolk, the east of England and the whole of England.

Distance Travelled to Work

The proportion of those in work who travel less than 2kms to work (28%) is significantly higher than the averages for Suffolk, the east of England or the whole of England. The proportion of people working from home in 2001 was 9%, which is the same as the averages for the east of England and the whole of England, but slightly below the average for Suffolk.

Horse Racing Industry

Newmarket is recognised both nationally and internationally as the headquarters of the horse racing industry. It is estimated that around 20% of jobs in the Newmarket area (over 2,000 jobs) are related to horse racing.

Vacant Retail Units in Town Centres

In 2002, the proportion of vacant retail units in Brandon and Mildenhall was above the Suffolk average and the proportion in Newmarket was below.

Tourism – Visitor Numbers

In 2000, Forest Heath was host to 11% of Suffolk's total recorded day visitors. If visitors were evenly distributed between the seven local authorities in Suffolk, then each District would receive 14%.

Tourism – Accommodation and Attractions

In 2001, Forest Heath had the second highest number of visitor bed-spaces of all the Suffolk Districts. This is largely due to the presence of Center Parcs. However, the District had the second lowest number of tourism attractions in Suffolk.

Housing

The Evidence

Existing Housing Stock

As at March 2005, the total number of dwellings in the District was 25,118. The draft RSS14 is proposing a 23% increase between 2005 and 2021.

House Building

In the seven years between 1996 and 2003, the annual average building rate was 156 new dwellings, which is only 60% of the Structure Plan requirement of 260 a year. This was both the lowest proportion and number of all of the Suffolk authorities, most of which were either meeting or exceeding their requirements.

In the four years between 2001 and 2004, 552 new dwellings were built in Forest Heath, at an average annual rate of 138 a year. This annual completion rate is only 43% of the Regional Plan annual requirement of 320 a year.

If the draft Regional Plan total of 6,400 new dwellings is to be achieved, then a further 5,848 dwellings, an average of 366 dwellings a year, will need to be built in the 16 years between 2005 and 2021.

Existing Housing Stock by Type

On the basis of the 2001 census the mix of housing types in Forest Heath compared to the whole of England was as follows:

	Forest Heath	England
Detached	36%	22%
Semi-detached	29%	32%
Terrace	22%	26%
Flats, maisonettes and bedsits	12%	20%
Caravans, other temporary dwellings	1%	0%

There are some significant variations with the England-wide proportions. However, the Suffolk-wide proportions are similar to those in Forest Heath.

Household Size

In 2001, the mix of household sizes in the District were as follows:

1 person	– 29%
2 person	– 35%
3 person	– 16%
4 person	– 14%
5 person	– 5%
6 or more person	– 1%

This is a similar mix to those for the whole of England, the east of England and Suffolk. Therefore, Forest Heath has a typical, average mix.

Quality of the Existing Housing Stock

In 2001, 2.4% of the housing stock was classified as unfit, which is below the average for Suffolk of 3.4%. The 2001 census included an assessment of overcrowding. 5% of households in Forest Heath were classified as overcrowded, compared to 4% for Suffolk, 5% for the east of England and 7% for the whole of England.

In 2001, 4.4% of households in Forest Heath were without central heating, compared to 7.6% for Suffolk, 5.1% for the east of England and 8.4% for the whole of England.

House Prices

In March 2004, the average house price in the District was just below the averages for Suffolk, the east of England and the whole of England. However, there were variations within the District and the average house price in Newmarket was above the national average.

Affordable Housing – Price to Income Ratio

In 2001, it generally cost between 4.5 and 5.5 times the average Forest Heath income to buy a dwelling in the District. This is in line with most of the rest of Suffolk and was in the average band for the whole of the east of England, which ranged from less than 3.5 to more than 7.5. However, the ratio is worsening and by 2003 was calculated to be between 5.5 and 6, just below the Suffolk average.

Stock of Social Housing

Between 1990 and 2004, the stock of social housing for rent from either the Council or a housing association has decreased from 4,029 to 3,852, whereas the overall housing stock has increased from 21,900 to 24,692. Hence, the proportion of social housing to the overall stock has decreased from 18.4% to 15.6%. In 2001, the average proportion in England was 21%.

In the four years between 2001 and 2004, 78 affordable dwellings were built, which was 14% of the total number of new dwellings, compared to the 30% required by the Regional Plan or the 25% recommended in the 2000 Forest Heath Housing Needs Survey. A total of 1,842 affordable dwellings will need to be built in Forest Heath between 2005 and 2021 if the Regional Plan requirement of 1,920 (30% of 6,400) is to be achieved.

Special Needs Housing

The 2001 census recorded that 19% of the District's population was aged over 60 and 14.5% had a limiting long term illness.

Vacant Housing and Second Homes

The latest 2005 records indicate that 1% of the housing stock are long-term vacant dwellings (unoccupied for longer than six months) and 0.7% are second homes.

Transport

The Evidence

Car Ownership

Car ownership in Forest Heath is above the national average. In 2001, 17% of households had no car, compared to 27% nationally. 45% had one car (43% nationally), 31% had two cars (24% nationally), 5% had three cars (5% nationally) and 2% had four or more cars (1% nationally).

Traffic Levels

Increases in traffic levels between 1996 and 2003 on roads within Forest Heath were significantly less than those Suffolk-wide. If the 1996 level represents 100 then the Forest Heath increase is to 103 in 2003 compared to 113 Suffolk-wide, the smallest increase of all the Suffolk local authorities. Changes on particular roads were as follows:

A11 at Eleveden +1.6%

A14 at Risby +26.3%

A1065 south of Eriswell +10.6%

A1065 south west of Brandon +5.6%

A1101 Beck Row -33%

A1101 Mildenhall, north of College Heath Road -6.7%

B1112 Eriswell, south of C602 +69.5%

C624 Tuddenham, east of U6204 -8.1%

Length of Journey to Work

In 2001, the proportion of Forest Heath residents in work who travel less than 2kms to work (28%) was significantly higher than the averages for Suffolk, the east of England or the whole of England. The proportion of people working from home in 2001 was 9%, which was the same as the averages for the east of England and the whole of England but slightly below the average for Suffolk.

Journey to Work, Mode of Transport

In 2001, the percentage of Forest Heath residents in work who normally travel to work by car was 65%, the national average being 55%. Those travelling by train was less than 1% (4% national average), those travelling by bus was 2% (national average 8%). However, those travelling by bicycle (5%) and walking (11%) were above the national averages of 3% and 10%.

Quality of Bus Services

Suffolk County Council has set out minimum bus service levels. In 2003, it estimated that 95.7% of parishes in Forest Heath achieved that standard compared to 92.7% Suffolk-wide.

Environmental Resources

The Evidence

Diverse Natural and Built Heritage

The District is one of the smallest rural Districts in the UK, just under 38,000 hectares. However, it is made up of four distinct landscape character areas, which make for a diverse character in terms of both landscape and vernacular buildings.

Designated Landscape

50% of the area of the District is designated as special landscape area in the Local Plan (1995) and the Suffolk Structure Plan (2001). This amounts to 17% of the designated landscape in Suffolk, which is the second highest proportion of the rural Districts after Suffolk Coastal (42%).

Area of Woodland

17% of the District is covered by woodland, the majority of which is commercial coniferous forest, and only 1% is designated as ancient woodland. The woodland in Forest Heath contributes 20% of the total woodland in Suffolk, which is above the average for the other rural Districts.

Area designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest

33% of the District's area is designated as SSSIs because of their nationally important wildlife interests. This is a significantly higher proportion than any other district in Suffolk, and the area of SSSI in Forest Heath amounts to 39% of the total in Suffolk.

Biodiversity

72% of the species identified in the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan are found in the District. One of the regional biodiversity targets is to create an additional 2000 ha of reed beds and fen by 2010. The recently created RSPB reserve at Lakenheath covers nearly 300 ha, 15% of the regional target.

Proportion of the Population Living within 5kms of an Informal Countryside Recreation Site.

97% of the population live within 5kms of an informal countryside recreation site, which is just above the Suffolk-wide average of 93%.

High Quality Agricultural Land

30% of all agricultural land in the District is classified as grade 1 or 2 and 4% is farmed organically.

Conservation Areas

2% of the District's area is designated as conservation areas because of the special architectural and historical character of the locality. This is just below the Suffolk-wide average of 2.6%.

Architecturally and Historically Important Listed Buildings at Risk

In 2003, the proportion of all listed buildings classified as at risk was 1.9% (nine properties). Whilst this is one of the lowest numbers of properties in Suffolk it is the highest proportion and twice the Suffolk average of 0.8%.

Unique Heritage of Newmarket

Newmarket is the only place in the world which still has horse racing stables operating in and around the town centre.

Air Quality Management Areas

In 2001, there were no significant areas of air pollution which required the designation of an air quality management area. Elsewhere in Suffolk there were a total of eight air quality management areas affecting a total of 51 properties.

Capacity of Renewable Energy Schemes within the District

As at 2004, no known renewable energy is produced within the District, although it is understood that woodland waste from Thetford Forest is used to produce renewable energy at the power station just over the boundary in Breckland District. Both the national and regional targets are for 10% of electricity consumption to be from renewable sources by 2010.

Energy Efficiency

Between 1996 and 2003, there was only an 8.7% increase in energy efficiency in residential properties in the District. This is below the rate required to achieve the national target of a 30% increase by 2011.

Proportion of Household Waste Recycled

Approximately 50%, one of the highest proportions in England and ahead of the national target.

Proportion of the District designated as Floodrisk

21% of the District is designated by the Environment Agency as being at potential flood risk.

Proportion of the District suffering from Significant Aircraft Noise

17% of the District suffers from aircraft noise of 70 dB(A) or above. This is a significant problem because of the two large military airbases in the District.

Visitor Numbers to Main Leisure Attractions per Annum

Center Parcs – not known
 FHDC leisure centres and swimming pools in Brandon, Mildenhall and Newmarket – 450,000
 Newmarket Racecourse – 353,000
 High Lodge Visitor Centre, Thetford Forest – 300,000
 Brandon Country Park – 92,000
 Brandon Country Park, Visitor Centre – 63,400
 The National Horse Racing Museum – 19,350
 The National Stud – 16,000
 West Row Stadium - not known
 Lakenheath Fen RSPB Reserve – 7,000
 Mildenhall Museum – 5,000
 Brandon Heritage Centre - not known

Satisfaction with Leisure Facilities

In 2004, a MORI poll of 500 Forest Heath residents indicated the following:
 60% of Forest Heath residents would like to see more leisure facilities (cinema/bowling alley/skating rink etc) provided in the next 10 years (compared to the Suffolk-wide average of 41%).
 13% thought that leisure facilities were particularly good (compared to the Suffolk-wide average of 25%).
 44% thought leisure facilities were in need of improvements (compared to the Suffolk-wide average of 28%).

Sports Clubs

160 local sports clubs are registered in the Council's Sports Club Guide.

Interest in the Arts

Over 600 people are registered as interested in supporting local arts events within the District, plus there are 120 known local clubs/societies.

Culture

The Evidence

Proportion of the Population Living Within 5kms of an Informal Countryside Recreation Site.

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Implementation

The Evidence

House Building

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If the draft Regional Plan total of 6,400 new dwellings is to be achieved, then an average of 366 dwellings a year will need to be built in the 16 years between 2005 and 2021.

Health Facilities/Service Improvements

Currently, no contributions towards health service facility/service improvements are sought from developers in Forest Heath.