

St Neots Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base

Contents Page

Section	Page
Introduction	3
Demographic Profile of Local Population	5
Land Use and Planning	7
Housing	21
Transport	23
Natural Environment	25
Historic Environment	32
Urban Design	36
Local Employment and Industries	37
Town Centre	40
Community Infrastructure	46
Education	51
St Neots Healthcheck	53
Evidence base documents	55

Introduction

There are numerous evidence base documents that have informed the preparation of the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan. A list of the key evidence base documents is included at the end of this report. This report summarises the key findings and messages from the evidence base. Compiling this report has been very useful as it has directly led to the development of options for the Neighbourhood Plan.

The recent boundary changes to St. Neots means that it now extends south to Eaton Ford to include the former village of Eynesbury and across the River Great Ouse to take in Eaton Socon, which were once part of Bedfordshire. The St Neots Neighbourhood Plan covers the town of St Neots, which is the Town Council boundary. This includes the wards of Eaton Ford, Eaton Socon, Eynesbury and Priory Park and future development at Loves Farm and Wintringham Park as shown in figure 1.

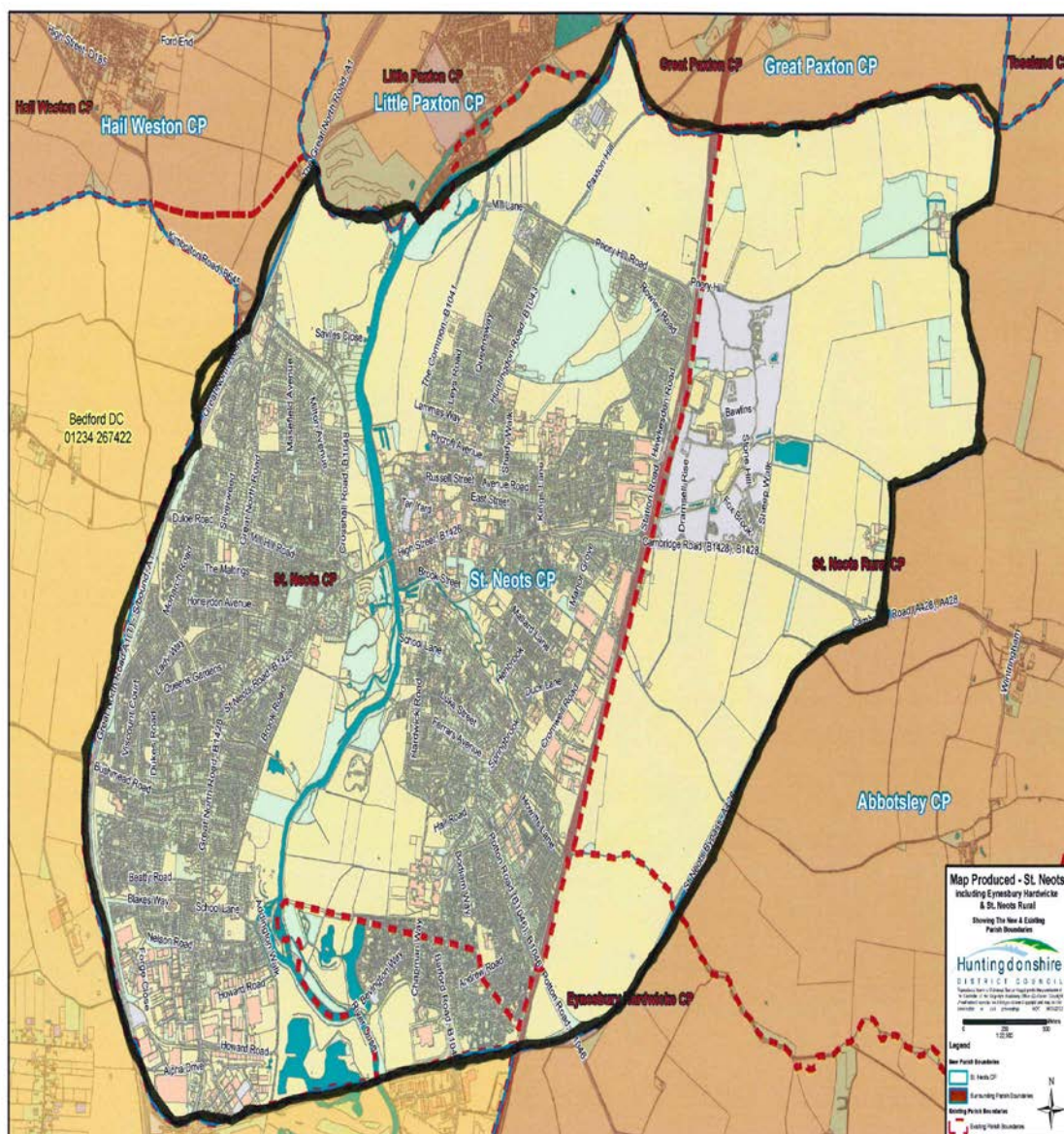


Figure 1. Map of St Neots. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the area delineated by the black line.

Demographic Profile of the Local Population

The population of St Neots at the time of the 2011 Census was 31,165. In 2001 the population was 30,500; a growth of 665 in 10 years. The majority of growth in recent years has been in the Eynesbury area and eastern expansion (Loves Farm). As shown in table 1, below, Eynesbury has the highest population of the four wards and Eaton Socon the lowest. There were 13,148 households in St Neots in 2011.

The highest density (people per hectare) is in Eynesbury, which has a density of 35.2 people per hectare. Priory Park has the lowest density at 3.4 people per hectare as this ward covers a large, undeveloped area.

The mean percentage of the economically active working population in full time employment was 46.2% and in part time employment was 14% in 2011. The mean percentage of the economically active working population that are unemployed was 3.6%. Eaton Ford has the lowest percentage of economically active population unemployed at 2.4%, Eynesbury has the highest at 4.1%. The percentage of people aged >16 years with no formal qualifications really varies between the four wards as shown in the table. Eaton Ford has the lowest percentage at 16.6% and Eaton Socon has the highest percentage at 25.8%.

The average weekly household income for the period 2007-8 was £800 in Eaton Ford, £650 in Eaton Socon, £680 in Eynesbury and £630 in Priory Park (the Priory Park figure is from 2001-2).

	Population	Households	Density (people per ha)	% of economically active working FT	% of economically active working PT	% of economically active unemployed	> 16yrs with no formal qualifications
Eaton Ford	6815	2856	26.7	45	15.6	2.4	16.6
Eaton Socon	5704	2447	27.4	45.9	13.4	3.9	25.8

Eynesbury	10477	4334	35.2	47.5	13.8	4.1	22
Priory Park	8169	3511	3.4	46.5	13.3	4	20.9
Total	31165	13148					

Table 1. Population and employment profile of St Neots.

In terms of its population profile St Neots contains high proportions of retired and younger populations compared to the national and regional averages. The mean age in Eaton Ford was 41.7 years, 40.7 years in Eaton Socon, 37.2 years in Eynesbury and 37.9 years in Priory Park, which compares to a district average of 39.9 years.

Eynesbury has been identified by the EU Commission as a deprived area in terms of economic, social, education and employment indicators. Eaton Ford ranks 8,066 on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for Wards Rank (2000) Eaton Socon ranks 5,300 Eynesbury ranks 3,634 and Priory Park ranks 5,283 (where 1 is the most deprived, and 8414 the least deprived).

Land Use and Planning

St Neots is bounded to the west by the A1 and the south by the A428, although there is some development to the south of the A428 within Bedford Borough. The railway line historically formed the eastern boundary to development, but development beyond this has taken place and further development is planned as part of the St Neots East Strategic Expansion.

Huntingdonshire District Council has an adopted Core Strategy (2009) and an emerging Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan must be in conformity with adopted planning policy but should also have regard to emerging planning policy. The spatial vision for Huntingdonshire, as set out in the Core Strategy, is relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan and is set out below.

“The Spatial Vision

In 2026 Huntingdonshire will have retained its distinct identity as a predominantly rural area with vibrant villages and market towns. Residents will be happier, healthier and more active and will enjoy an improved quality of life with improved access to a wider range of local jobs, housing, high quality services and facilities and green infrastructure.

Sustainable Development and Responding to Climate Change

Delivering the required growth sustainably and in a way that mitigates against and responds to our changing climate will be the most significant challenge for the Development Plan. Development will therefore respond to the need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by ensuring that energy is used efficiently both in the construction and use of buildings and more of the energy used comes from zero or low carbon sources. The location of development will minimise the need to travel especially by car, make sustainable forms of travel more convenient and so reduce the impact of transport on climate change. Global warming is likely to enhance extremes of weather and the potential of increased risk of flooding that comes from the likelihood of wetter and milder winters could affect much of Huntingdonshire. Also the East of England is already one of the driest areas in the country for much of the year and this is likely to get worse with climate change and will have implications for the use of water in new and existing development.

Protection of Character

The traditional hierarchy of Market Towns and larger villages serving the smaller settlements within their rural hinterland will be maintained with increasing emphasis on the promotion of sustainable communities. The character of our towns, villages and their historic cores will be protected and enhanced with care taken to ensure new development is well integrated with its surroundings. The integrity of our towns and villages will be maintained by ensuring that there is separation between settlements, and in particular between Peterborough and nearby villages in Huntingdonshire. Villages near Peterborough will benefit from development within the city through access to an improved range of amenities and facilities while the areas of countryside and green space around those villages will act as an important resource for the expanded population of Peterborough. The landscape of Huntingdonshire will be protected and enhanced. Housing growth, particularly in the Huntingdon and St Neots areas, will be supported by the protection and enhancement of areas of green space around them including the Ouse Valley, the woodlands around Grafham Water and Brampton and the wetland and woodlands of the Great Fen Project. Further opportunities for improved recreation of these areas and to enhance their biodiversity will be identified together with access to the areas of population.

Villages and Countryside

To promote the sustainability of our villages and countryside appropriate investment in the rural economy will be encouraged, including complementary diversification of agricultural holdings. Provision of affordable housing on rural exceptions sites will be encouraged to help people remain in, or return to, their local communities. Transport services, communication links and access to key services and facilities will be protected and improved where possible to help people living in, working in or visiting villages and the countryside pursue sustainable lifestyles. Huntingdonshire's villages and countryside offer abundant habitats for plants and wildlife; opportunities will be maximised to maintain and enhance the quality and diversity of habitats supported.

Sustainable Patterns of Growth and Sufficient Housing to Meet Needs

During this time Huntingdonshire will play a proactive role in accommodating housing growth, including any appropriate specialist housing and much needed affordable housing, required as part of the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough growth corridor while respecting, maintaining and enhancing the special character of its natural, historic and built environments. The majority of growth will be concentrated in the most sustainable locations. More limited development will be supported in larger villages to help sustain their existing facilities and amenities, without damaging their character. In other villages schemes that sustain and enhance the vitality of established communities, through the appropriate development of homes and businesses, will be supported where they are compatible with environmental designations and constraints. In conjunction with the proposed housing growth appropriate provision of health, education, training, community, leisure and open space facilities will be secured.

Employment that Suits the Needs of the Population and Reduces Out-commuting

Future strategic employment development will be located in the most sustainable locations. This is primarily in order to ensure delivery of the most marketable sites but it also follows housing growth to ensure the creation of balanced communities. The Council will promote the provision of a wider range of local employment opportunities, particularly high quality sites for advanced manufacturing, environmental technologies, ICT and creative industries. This will help limit levels of out-commuting to London, Peterborough and Cambridge and ensure the continuing success of the District's economy.

Enhanced Market Towns

Market towns will be encouraged to respond to pressure from competing centres outside the district in order to further strengthen the District's economy, provide more choice and reduce the need to travel. Appropriate development opportunities will be identified within and close to the town centres to accommodate further investment. Further improvements to the public realm to make the town centres more attractive will be encouraged.

Maximise Use of Previously Developed Land

Proactive measures will be taken to maximise the use of previously developed land. However a significant proportion of sites will come forward on greenfield land given the

limited availability of brownfield land in sustainable locations. Redundant military bases in Huntingdonshire will need careful consideration to ensure that any potential re-use or redevelopment maximises the economic benefit to the District.

Increased Capacity of the Transport Network

The proposed A14 improvements will assist much of the development in the Huntingdon area to take place and will improve access to and around the town centre, but individual developments within the Huntingdon SPA may take place subject to demonstrating either 'minimal impact' or 'nil detriment' on traffic flows on the A14. In the longer term an enhanced A428 in the St Neots area will facilitate the continuing development of a sustainable community beyond the plan period. Improvements in public transport will enable the promotion of sustainable travel options, particularly through the Cambridge to St Ives Guided Bus with associated bus priority measures between St Ives and Huntingdon, enabling more convenient sustainable travel to and from Cambridge. The provision of high quality public transport along the A428 corridor will enable similar convenience between St Neots and Cambridge.”

The spatial vision recognises that to protect landscape character it is important to protect and enhance areas of green space around St Neots. It recognises that it is important to balance growing communities to reduce levels of out-commuting to London and Cambridge. Market towns are acknowledged as important to the economy and the spatial vision refers to extending town centres and improving the public realm to compete with other centres and reducing the need to travel. The vision refers to long term proposals to enhance the A428, which will facilitate further growth beyond the Core Strategy plan period.

The St Neots Spatial Policy Area, as set out in the Core Strategy, identifies the need for at least 2,650 new homes, 25 hectares of employment land and 9,000 sqm of retail space within the plan period. The St Neots Spatial Policy Area (SPA) includes the town of St Neots (i.e. the Neighbourhood Plan area) and the village of Little Paxton to the north. Little Paxton has its own distinct identity and is physically separated from St Neots by the River Ouse, however because residents in Little Paxton use services and facilities in St Neots, the SPA includes Little Paxton.

Policy CS2 (Strategic Housing Development) states that at least 2,650 new homes will be delivered in St Neots and that at least 150 of these will be on brownfield land within the centre of the town. Around 2,500 homes will therefore be built on greenfield land. About 1060 of these will be affordable homes and these homes will be delivered through a mixed use development, which will include 25 hectares of employment land to deliver Use Classes B1, B2 and B8, to the east of the town. The allocation of 25 hectares of employment land is higher than the requirement set out in the now revoked East of England Plan, however the District Council sought to balance the major new housing development with additional employment land in an attempt to reduce levels of out-commuting.

Policy CS9 (Strategic Green Infrastructure Enhancement) identifies two green infrastructure projects within St Neots: the Grafham Water/ Brampton Woods area and the Great Ouse valley area. The policy states that it is important that resources are directed to these projects early on in the plan period to ensure that the new population has good access to outdoor recreation.

Huntingdonshire District's Adopted Core Strategy (2009) identifies St Neots as a focus for growth. In 2011 an urban design framework for the Eastern Expansion of the town was adopted by the District Council. The purpose of this framework is to describe the main planning and design factors and requirements that developers must address to deliver a sustainable urban extension. The eastern urban extension (excluding Love's Farm) has the capacity to provide land for the development of 3,500 new dwellings. Community facilities and services such as schools, shops, recreation and open space will also be required, along with 25 hectares of employment land. The urban design framework also recognises that there is a potential to provide combined heat and power from excess/ wasted capacity at the nearby Little Barford Power Station. The District Council envisages that the eastern expansion (including Loves Farm) will accommodate around 12,000 new residents.

The Huntingdonshire District Local Plan Draft to 2036 was published for consultation in summer 2013. A pre-submission version of the Local Plan is expected to be published for consultation in early 2014 and following this an Examination into the soundness of the Local Plan will take place. Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan must be in conformity with adopted planning policy it should have regard to emerging planning policy.

The Draft Local Plan spatial strategy includes three strategic expansion locations and one of these is St Neots Eastern Expansion (see figure 2). The Eastern Expansion includes 224ha of land east of Love's Farm and at Wintringham Park, Cambridge Road. This land is allocated for:

- approximately 3700 homes
- approximately 25ha of employment land (Class B1, B2 and B8)
- a main centre of some 3ha containing offices (Class B1), approximately 4,000m² of gross retail floorspace (Class A1) including a supermarket with a maximum gross retail floorspace of 3,000m² and other A2 to A5 and ancillary uses
- a neighbourhood centre of some 0.3ha containing a maximum of 200m² of retail floorspace (Class A1) and other A2 to A5 and ancillary uses
- primary school provision
- community facilities
- strategic green space and open space.

Successful development of the site will require satisfactory resolution of the impact of additional traffic on the A428 having regard to a transport assessment and travel plan and a masterplan completed as part of an outline application that addresses:

- details of phasing and development
- a sustainable transport network for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians
- differentiated densities of development depending on proximity to centres
- the mix of uses to be incorporated, including social and community facilities to meet the needs of the proposed development
- the incorporation of retail shops appropriate to the area which are complementary to the continued vitality and viability of the town centre
- the creation of an attractive St Neots East centre fronting Cambridge Road, designed in full in advance of any uses being established, identifying how the various uses will share communal spaces and contribute to a sense of place
- the creation of a neighbourhood centre near to the underpass by Howitt's Lane
- the creation of a landscaped business park with frontage to the A428
- provision for habitats in accordance with an ecological assessment

- areas that contribute to the strategic green infrastructure network, for example linking with the Ouse Valley and to the south
- green and open space creation throughout the development and on the edges for a variety of recreational purposes
- tree survey and provision for habitats in accordance with an ecological assessment
- landscape design recognising vistas, boundaries, and green infrastructure networks
- design codes for the appearance of development proposals
- noise assessment and acoustic treatments in relation to the East Coast Main Line
- flood risk assessment and provision of sustainable drainage systems
- opportunities for a decentralised low carbon energy network where viable
- separation from the gas pipeline and high voltage electricity transmission line in accordance with National Grid requirements
- waste minimisation, re-use and recovery.

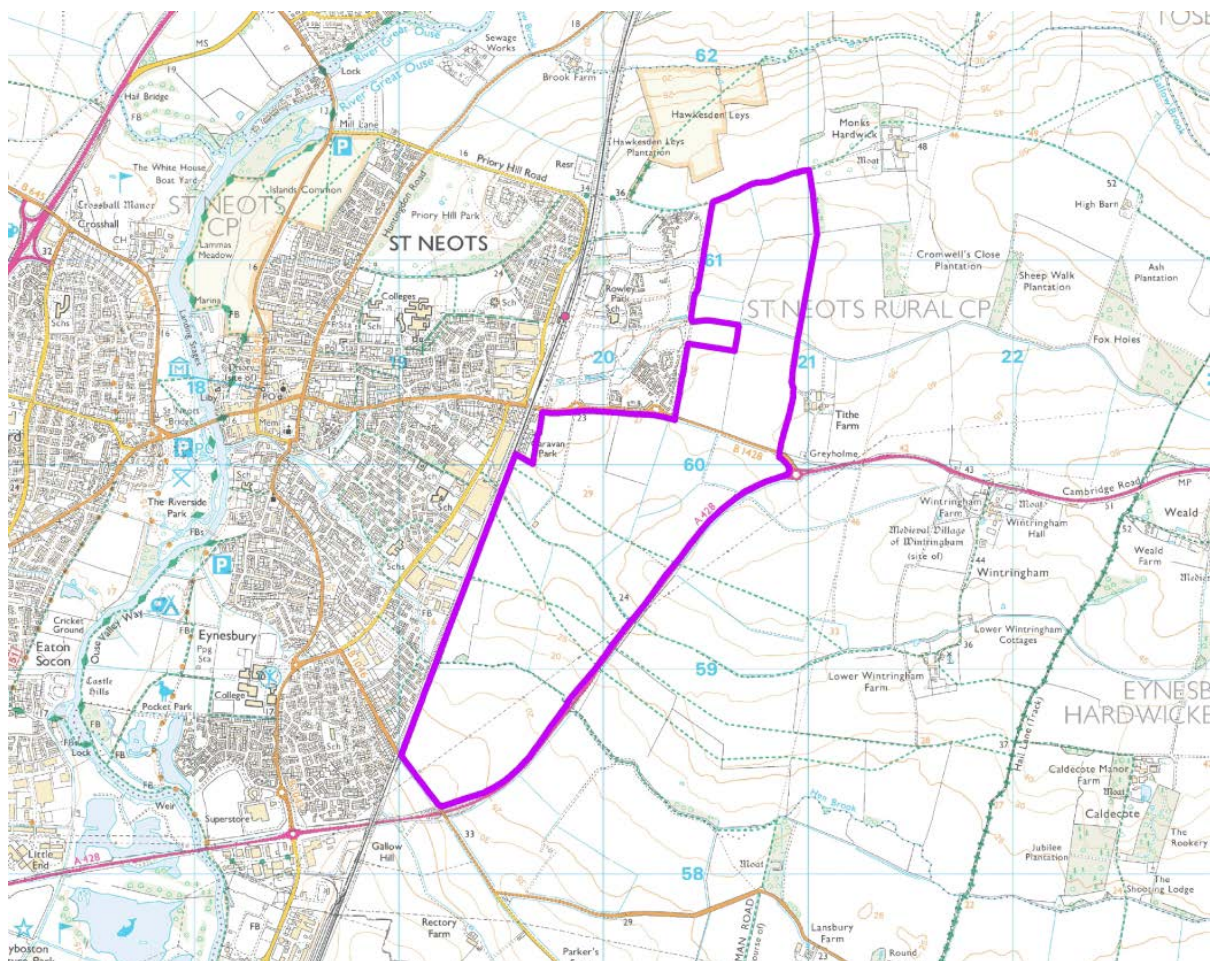


Figure 2. St Neots Eastern Expansion

Outline planning applications were submitted in 2013 for development at Wintringham Park (South of Cambridge Road) (Application reference 1300178OUT) and Loves Farm East (North of Cambridge Road) (Application reference 1300388OUT).

The Draft Local Plan also allocates the following sites for development¹:

- Love's Farm – 1ha of land to deliver 41 dwellings in accordance with the outline planning consent.
- Former Youth Centre, Priory Road – 0.48ha to deliver 14 dwellings in accordance with the outline planning consent.
- Huntingdon Street – 0.6ha mixed use site to deliver 15 dwellings and 0.25ha of employment.
- Fire Station, Huntingdon Street – 0.4ha to deliver 14 dwellings once alternative provision for the fire service has been agreed with the LPA.
- Former Regional College, Huntingdon Street – 2.2ha mixed use site to deliver 50 dwellings or a combination of dwellings and educational or community facilities; and supported housing or an alternative use such as a community facility of 0.5ha of employment fronting Huntingdon Street.
- St Mary's Urban Village – 0.7ha mixed use site to deliver 40 dwellings, retention of Brook House as offices and 60m² of retail floorspace in accordance with Urban Design Framework and Master Plan.
- Cromwell Road Car Park – 0.5ha site to deliver 20 dwellings.

St Neots Town Council responded to the Draft Local Plan consultation in July 2013 and their comments are very important as they set out the Town Council's view on proposed development in the town. The essence of the Town Council response is that every resident should suffer nil detriment to their lives or life styles due to proposed development in St Neots and the Draft Local Plan does not offer this.

St Neots Town Council are concerned that there is not enough emphasis on striking the correct balance between housing development and new or improved infrastructure.

¹ Numbers of dwellings expected are approximate.

The Town Councils greatest concerns are related to highways issues. Particularly the issue of the A428 and the increased traffic that will be caused by the large developments at St Neots East. The Town Council has requested an assurance from the Highways Agency that major improvements are made to any existing junctions, and that any new junctions put in place due to development will all have a “Nil Detriment” effect on existing traffic using this important traffic link for the town. The Town Council believe that the A428 is essential to the improvement of the local economy in St Neots and wishes to work with HDC to ensure that the dueling of the A428 is included in the Department for Transport’s national road programme. Without major improvements to the A428 between Black Cat Roundabout and Caxton Gibbet the Town Council believe that St Neots will not enjoy the economic growth that is proposed in the Local Plan as it is unlikely that people wanting to live in St Neots will want to deal with the biggest pinch point in the town’s transport infrastructure on a day to day basis. The stretch of road between the St Neots and Caxton Gibbet forms part of the national strategic road network. It is the only stretch of the route between Milton Keynes and Cambridge that isn’t dual carriageway standard. It is also used heavily by local traffic wishing to access the local Tesco Supermarket, residents generally getting around town or commuter traffic in peak hours. The Highways Agency report in response to the planning applications for St Neots East clearly show they have concerns, and have placed a holding order on the planning applications until such times as a solution which makes “nil detriment” on current traffic possible. Local roads should also be substantially improved due to increased funding being announced for the maintenance of the local highway network by central government over the next seven years. Many of St Neots roads are currently in need of urgent repairs or require re-surfacing already. The huge increase in use as development increases traffic will only make these roads deteriorate further. It is also essential that there is an additional river crossing road through St Neots. With the large number of new residents the town already has from recent development and the proposed increase of population of several thousand it will become impossible to move through town without a further road crossing the river allowing the smooth running of local traffic without the need for residents to use the A428 to move around the town.

The Town Council do not believe that the transport system can cope with major housing developments within the centre of the town and has requested that development sites within the town centre are developed as mixed use retail and leisure.

The Town Council has requested the following infrastructure to meet the needs of existing and new communities:

- A428 is essential to the economic growth of St Neots. It is the only access road to Cambridge or Bedford and beyond, as St Neots has a large number of commuters who rely on the road we wish to see this road dueled at the earliest opportunity.

- “Nil detriment” on the existing traffic load of the A428 should be achieved if development is to go ahead as per the District Plan (Loves Farm East & Wintringham Park)

- “Nil detriment” on the local road network achieved through:

- o traffic mode shift,

- o new cycle ways, including repairs/replacement of pedestrian river bridge and safer routes to schools for younger cyclists

- o new bus services, routes and a dedicated bus station in St Neots

- o consideration of construction of a new river road crossing through St Neots

- o provision of bollards/planters to prevent anti- social parking on pavements near the railway station

- o Major improvements at the Black Cat roundabout which causes major disruption to traffic using the A428

- o additional off-street parking in the centre of St Neots

- o additional off-street parking along the new bus routes to enable existing residents to park safely

- Strict limits on increases in traffic linked to development phases such that mitigation measures and restrictions on further development are linked

- Monitoring to continue for 30 years with provision of bus services etc for as long as needed to control traffic to “nil detriment”
- No mixing of new commercial traffic with new residential traffic
- Weight restrictions on heavy goods vehicles using St Neots as a rat run when coming from Bedfordshire (through Eaton Socon)
- Improved traffic management for traffic using the town centre to reduce congestion
- Road widths to enable on street parking and passage of large vehicles – e.g. rubbish lorries
- On and off street parking for at least 2 cars per dwelling, with at least one off street car port per property in addition to garages
- Provision of new primary schools before first occupation,
- Provide additional pre-school facilities (e.g. SureStart and nursery provision)
- Provision of improvements and expansion to existing secondary school facilities in St Neots
- Provision of free bus service for secondary school children (allowing for attendance at after school activities etc). This should reduce the number of cars doing the school run.
- Provision of funds to allow existing out of date facilities to be rebuilt as community facilities, sports halls, and other recreation amenities with commuted sum to cover running and maintenance costs
- Provision of contribution towards cost of providing a dedicated Town Hall for St Neots
- Support and funding for facilities for senior citizens
- Contribution towards “churches” and other religious and spiritual beliefs
- Support for youth groups, including funding of youth clubs and support to groups such as scouts and guides
- Provision of new buildings to be shared by scouts, guides and cadets

- Provision of a large community hub to allow new services currently unavailable in St Neots, such as a job centre, as well as other existing services that will require more space and resource due to the increased population
- Provide 40% of all dwellings as Affordable Housing, with the mix of house types to reflect local needs and ensure preference given to the needs of St Neots residents and children
- Provision of required health centre(s) for dental and health with provision of disabled access buses for patients in areas of development
- Improvements to exiting medical facilities within the town
- A dedicated bus service to Hinchingsbrooke Hospital from the Town Centre
- Provision of required health centre(s) for dental and health with provision of disabled access buses for patients in areas of development
- Improvements to exiting medical facilities within the town
- A dedicated bus service to Hinchingsbrooke Hospital from the Town Centre
- Provide Children's Play space within the development area and provide for maintenance regime
- Provide a wide woodland buffer strip around the large development areas for walking and wildlife and recreation areas for residents
- Provide informal green space within the development areas and provide for appropriate maintenance regime

- Provision of section 106 funds to enable the town council to purchase additional land for the provision of cemeteries.
- Urgent requirement for cemetery land is now a serious issue as it is estimated current cemetery only has 5 years before full
- Provision of large area of allotment plots within development sites, include for maintenance regime and management costs
- Contribution towards the funding of land purchase within existing areas of the town for future increased allotment and community garden space
- Provide multi-use Outdoor Sports Provision within the development area, including a contribution for maintenance regime
- Provide with the development area and improve existing network into countryside for walking and cycling
- Provide new larger and more modern library facility, possibly as part of a community hub
- Provision of at least three bins per dwelling with adequate space for off street storage
- Provision of improved local recycling facilities
- An increase in local recycling centre's and provision of recycling banks on large estates (Clothing banks, paper banks etc)

- Upgrade existing surface water and foul sewerage systems, wastewater treatment and water supply networks at major development sites
 - Cabling for high speed broadband to all new dwelling and commercial premises
 - On-site flood control to ensure no impact on receiving sewers or watercourses due to development
 - Improved resilience for electricity supply in the St Neots area
-
- Comprehensive improvements to ensure “nil detriment” on the existing flood risk in St Neots due to the major development proposals at the St Neots East site

Housing

In 2011 there were 13440 homes in St Neots. This is an increase of 2140 in ten years (there were approximately 11,300 homes in St Neots in 2001). Table 2, below, shows the different types of housing across the four wards. Detached houses are the most common housing type in Eaton Ford, semi-detached is the most common housing type in Priory Park and terraced housing is the most common housing type in Eaton Socon and Eynesbury. Priory Park has the largest number of flats and Eynesbury has the largest number of caravans.

	Eaton Ford	Eaton Socon	Eynesbury	Priory Park	
Detached	1409	566	824	840	
Semi detached	657	788	1395	1108	
Terrace	535	796	1483	799	
Flat	314	332	667	860	
Caravan	2	7	50	8	
Total	2917	2489	4419	3615	13440

Table 2. Household types in St Neots.

There is a wide range of housing types and a high level of home ownership in St Neots. There is also a wide range of sheltered and supported housing, although there are still high levels of unmet need.

Housing affordability is a massive problem in St Neots. According to the Healthcheck, average earnings across the district would not enable the purchase of a house in St Neots based on standard mortgage criteria.

The average asking price in St Neots in November 2013 was £248,392 and at this time there were 238 homes for sale. Overall house prices have dropped by 3% since September 2006, with the greatest drop in detached houses (-11%) and flats (-10%). Since September 2006 the value of semi-detached homes has risen by 12% and the value of terraced homes has

risen by 13%. To compare this to the rest of the county; the average house price in Cambridgeshire was £238,087 in November 2013; slightly lower than St Neots. Since September 2006 house prices have increased by 4%. Unlike St Neots detached house prices across Cambridgeshire have increased by 13%. The value of semi-detached houses, terraced houses and flats have also decreased in Cambridgeshire over this period.

The District's Housing Strategy (2012) recognises that Huntingdonshire has been affected by the economic downturn of recent years. There has been a slight drop in affordable housing completions, a drop in house prices and houses are taking longer to sell. The development of strategic sites has not progressed as quickly as the District Council would have liked and the District Council will continue to support and encourage the delivery of strategic sites.

Affordable housing remains in very high demand and at the end of March 2012 there were over 2,700 households on Huntingdonshire District Council's housing register. The Loves Farm development created an uplift in the District's affordable housing programme. According to the District's Strategic Housing Market Assessment there is a need to build 1,002 new affordable homes every year for the next five years in order to meet need. The District Council anticipate that St Neots Eastern Expansion will make a significant contribution towards affordable housing need.

The key messages in the District's Housing Strategy are: Huntingdonshire needs housing growth, Huntingdonshire needs more affordable housing, homelessness needs to be tackled, and the District Council will work in partnership to meet the needs of the aging population.

Transport

St Neots is located 19 miles to the west of Cambridge and is accessed via the A428. The A1 passes directly to the west of St Neots and provides a direct route to Huntingdon and Peterborough to the north, and Stevenage and London to the south. The A421 runs south west to Bedford, whilst the B645 connects St Neots to Kimbolton and Rushden to the northwest. The A428 and A1 form a southerly and westerly ring road around St Neots reducing the need for through traffic to pass through the town centre. The town centre is accessed via the B1428, B1048, B1043 or the B1041.

St Neots is well served to the North and South by good rail links and trains to London take approximately one hour with some as little as 45 minutes. However, connectivity by rail to the east and west is difficult, it takes one change and a journey time of 1:20 to reach Cambridge. Local coach and bus services are available. However, connectivity to surrounding villages by public transport is poor.

The location of the railway station on the eastern edge of the town reduces its accessibility as it is 1.8km from St Neots Town Centre and nearly 5km by road from the most distant parts of Eaton Socon. A pedestrian overbridge from the railway station linking with Loves Farm is planned which will boost accessibility to the station from new homes to the east.

The section of the A428 between Caxton Gibbet and St Neots is the only section of the main east-west route between the M1 and the east coast which remains as single carriageway. It is recognised that this will also need to be upgraded although the DfT have no programme for this at present.

Levels of car ownership in the St Neots and Huntingdonshire District are high compared with the national average as it is both a relatively prosperous and predominantly rural area. Within Eaton Ford there are 4,317 cars and 10.2% of households do not own a car. Within Eaton Socon there are 3,123 cars and 17.9% of households do not own a car. Within Eynesbury there are 5,531 cars and 17.7% of households do not own a car. Within Priory Park there are 4,146 cars and 21.8% of households do not own a car. Within St Neots town there are a total of 17,117 cars. This equates to 1.3 cars per household, which is higher than

the national average of 1.1 cars per household. The national average of households without a car is 25.8%.

As the private car is the dominant mode of transport through and around the town congestion is a problem. Congestion within the Town Centre is heightened by the one river crossing. There is a lack of facilities for cyclists and a lack of well lit and well directed pedestrian routes around the town.

Cambridgeshire County Council organised a Festival of Cycling during summer 2013. During the summer the County Council visited ten towns in the county, including St Neots, to promote cycling and ask people their views on cycling. 227 people attended the event in St Neots on 18 May 2013. Two thirds of these people said that they cycle at least once a week and 90% said that they would like to cycle more. In St Neots respondents felt that the biggest barrier to cycling was that “the roads are too busy or too dangerous”, with 38% of total responses. This was followed by “the weather puts me off” and “there’s nowhere to lock my bike” (12% and 11% respectively). 34% of people said that “safe cycle routes” would help them to cycle more. Nearly half the people who attended the St Neots event had arrived by car, with a third walking and the rest travelling by bus or bike. According to the home postcodes collected, a third lived in St Neots itself and half lived just one to three miles away.

The Huntingdonshire District Local Investment Framework identified the following transport infrastructure requirements for St Neots:

- Cambridge-St Neots Transport Corridor
- New Bus Service serving Love's Farm and South of Cambridge road, St Neots
- St Neots Railway Station Improvements
- A428/Cambridge Road Junction Improvement
- A428/Barford Road Junction Improvement
- St Neots Market Town Transport Strategy High Street Improvements
- Completion of St Neots Market Town Transport Strategy Schemes

Natural Environment

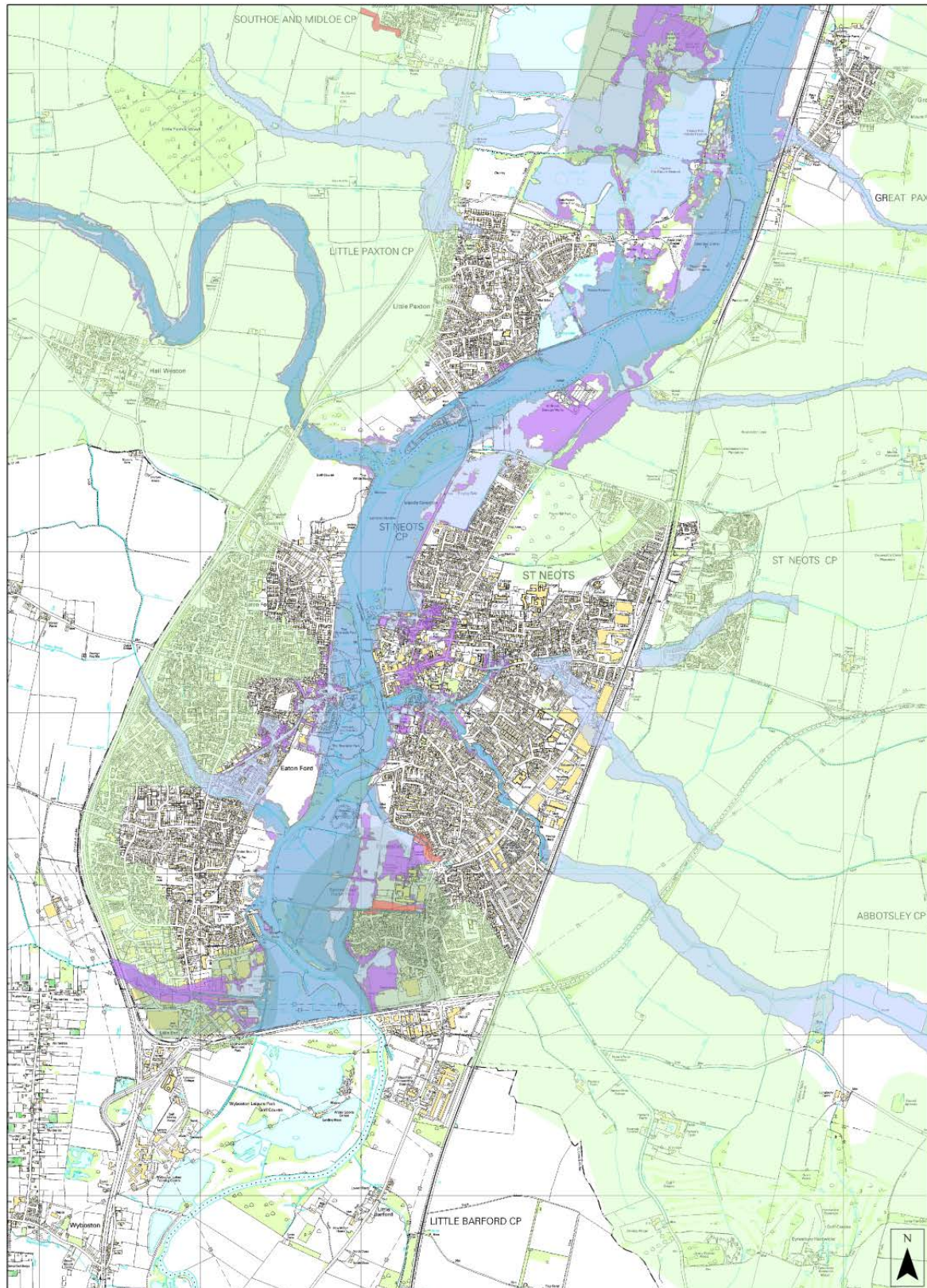
St Neots and Little Paxton are located at the southern edge of the River Great Ouse landscape character area. The landscape to the west lies within the Southern Wolds and the South East Claylands lie to the east. The close association of the town with the River Great Ouse, in terms of visual links, public open space and recreation, gives St Neots a strong sense of place and a highly distinctive landscape setting. The strong settlement edges defined by the A1 and the east coast mainline railway have resulted in a poor physical and visual relationship between the town and surrounding landscape to the east and west. St Neots is not widely visible from the surrounding landscape except when approached from Abbotsley to the south east, or Great Paxton to the north. The large scale industrial buildings which define the eastern edge of the town are clearly visible from the A428 and dominate views of the town from the adjacent agricultural landscape.

To the south of St Neots the landscape of the Central Claylands comprises agricultural land with large open fields of limited landscape value. Conversely, the landscape of the Ouse Valley which runs through the centre of the town is of high inherent landscape and ecological value and provides a highly distinctive setting to the town despite recent encroachment of development in places. Little Paxton has a limited relationship with the wider landscape to the west due to separation by the A1. To the north and east, there has been considerable gravel extraction within the floodplain resulting in the creation of a number of lakes which have now been incorporated within the Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and contribute strongly to the character of the surrounding landscape. Little Paxton is most visible from the south and east where it is seen from the surrounding valley sides within the River Great Ouse valley. The open river floodplain and countryside between St Neots and Little Paxton provides a landscape gap separating these settlements helping to ensure they each retain a clear and distinct identity.

In terms of nature conservation, Paxton Pits and St Neots Common are of particular environmental significance. Part of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve is a county wildlife site, designated by the Wildlife Trust because of the scarce flora and importance for breeding waders and warblers. St Neots Common, north of St Neots, and other parts of Paxton Pits are Sites of Special Scientific Interest containing alluvial grassland and associated ponds and

which together provide an area of diverse wildlife habitat supporting a variety of species. Nature conservation issues are a particular constraint to further development north or west of Little Paxton.

The River Great Ouse and its tributaries create significant areas which are vulnerable to flooding. Riverside Park adjacent to the St Neots town centre, Paxton Pits, St Neots Common, the St Neots Camping and Caravaning Club, parts of the Golf Club and other recreational areas are located within some of the areas most vulnerable to flooding. Floodwaters are diverted to some of these areas as part of the active flood management for the area. Flooding acts as a severe constraint to development through the central corridor of St Neots and to the west and north of Little Paxton. Figure 3, below shows the extent of the flood risk areas.



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (C) Crown Copyright
 Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. HDC 100022322

Figure 3. The River Great Ouse and areas at risk of flooding.

Flood events in St Neots have been under-reported, however it is known that major flood events occurred in March 1947 and Easter 1998, when the River Great Ouse and many of its tributaries overtopped their banks. Smaller or localised flooding events occurred in May 1978, July 1982, October 1993, April 2000, October 2001, January 2003, August 2004 and July 2007.

The Great Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan states that the flood risk in the St Neots/Little Paxton, Bedford/Kempston and Leighton Buzzard sub-area is too high. As a result the Environment Agency will investigate options to reduce the probability of river flooding. One option identified in the Plan is to consider storing water on the flood plains upstream of communities at risk. The Plan also says that organisations must work together to manage the risk of surface water flooding in St Neots.

The Plan suggests taking action to manage the consequences of flooding by adapting urban environments to make them more resilient to flooding. For example, as commercial sites are redeveloped, the location and layout of buildings could be designed to help reduce flood risk.

Priory Park is a sub-urban public park of amenity grassland, containing several areas of mature woodland, mature trees (including the native specimens of oak, chestnut, plane and lime), a children's play area, 5 football pitches, several mini soccer pitches, changing rooms and a pavilion. The pavilion contains 4 new changing rooms, referees changing rooms, a kitchen, a refreshment area/meeting room and CCTV equipment.

Priory Park is situated off Huntingdon Road and Priory Hill, St Neots, to the North-east of the Town Centre. It covers an area of 32 hectares (80 acres) and is owned by Huntingdonshire District Council. The site is accessible to the whole community and parking is available for approximately 40 cars.

The Priory Park Management Plan has the following vision: "To maintain and enhance the recreation facilities and biodiversity of Priory Park to provide a semi-natural leisure area for the residents of, and visitors to, St Neots."

Priory Park is an important part of a green link, including the gardens and green spaces of two housing estates. It lies just outside the western edge of a proposed new green corridor (No 22).

Priory Park is an important historical site, as it lies at the heart of what was once The Priory Farm, property of St Neots Priory from which the town evolved.

The park is regularly used frequently by a range of people for various activities such as picnics, dog walking, bird watching, orienteering and sponsored runs as well as well as children's holiday activity clubs in the summer. St Neots Sunday League Football hire the pitches and use the changing room facilities contained within the Pavilion. The park is also available for events organised by outside groups and has been used as such, two-three times a year, in the last five years. For example, in 2007 the park was used for both the Schools, and Police, cross country running championships and has been for historical re-enactments.

As part of a sample user survey undertaken as part of the Management Plan for the park a number of people suggested installing interpretation boards and a notice board.

Riverside Park is close to the Town Centre and is bisected by the bridge over the River Great Ouse. It is 29 hectares (72 acres) in area and has a beautiful one mile long waterside frontage. Most of the park lies within the floodplain. Access to the main park is via a pedestrian bridge over the river. The park has a 250 space car park and public toilets.

Within the Park there is a small restaurant, a putting green, pitch and putt course, boating lake, skateboarding complex, basketball court and children's play areas. Eaton Socon Football Club also lease a pitch. Band concerts are a regular occurrence on Sundays during the summer weeks. The park is also regularly used for the Town Carnival and Regatta.

Sudbury Meadow is a 2 acre site alongside the River Great Ouse. The site consists of a wildlife meadow & wildlife friendly garden area and has a wheelchair friendly path running through it.

Sudbury Meadow is a wildlife rich area, offering beauty and tranquillity. It provides excellent access to people who are mobility impaired. Sudbury Meadow brings local people

together in the enjoyment of the park and also the management of the habitats within the park.

Sudbury Meadow also has historical significance. Land between Crosshall Road and the River Great Ouse which belonged to the Manor of Sudbury was mentioned in the Domesday Book. In the seventeenth century Sudbury Meadow was enclosed and used for grazing until the late 1980s. Photos in St Neots Museum suggest that Sudbury Meadow was used for community events during the 1930s.

Regatta Meadow is located to the west of the river and to the north of Riverside Park. It frequently floods and thus provides a habitat for moisture loving flora. In the past it was used as a wet meadow for grazing and hay.

Like Sudbury Meadow it has historical significance, once forming part of the medieval Manor of Sudbury and sharing the name Sudbury Meadow. Whilst it provides an attractive area of open space within the town, it is also important for community events. Many events take place on Regatta Meadow.

Barford Road Pocket Park is a 45 acre site created in 2001 alongside the development of the Eynesbury Manor housing estate. The park has several types of habitat and is home to numerous bird species. A number of events are organised throughout the year.

There is an under provision of allotments in the town and a slight under provision of formal open space based on Huntingdonshire District Council's open space standards. The District's Open Space Audit found that there are 8.6 hectares of allotments within the town, which equates to 0.23ha per 1000 of the population. However, the recommended standard is for 0.32ha per 1000 of the population.

The Huntingdonshire District Local Investment Framework identified the following green infrastructure requirements for St Neots:

- Cambridge to St Neots Green Corridor
- Ouse Valley Strategic Green Space Corridor
- St Neots Green Space Corridor

- Ouse Valley to Cambourne Corridor -Additional crossing of River Great Ouse near Paxton Pits
- St Neots to Little Paxton Green Corridor
- Major Sites at Land East of St Neots

There is an Air Quality Management Area within the town, which is marginally above the national target for nitrogen dioxide.

Historic Environment

There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments in St Neots: the Benedictine Priory and the Maltings (former John Days Brewery). These are located in the Town Centre adjacent to Market Square, although the Benedictine Priory is not visible and the exact site has not been verified.

Listed buildings are predominantly clustered around the Town Centre and along Great North Road in Eaton Socon. There are 163 listed buildings within St Neots; 6 of these are Grade II* listed. The Church of St Mary in Brook Street is Grade I listed. The St Neots Healthcheck found that there is a general feeling that historic buildings should be utilized more effectively to show off St Neots heritage.

The following listed buildings are on the Buildings at Risk Register:

- Garden Wall, 140 St. Neots Road, Eaton Ford
- The White House, St Neots Road, Eaton Ford
- Boundary Wall at St Marys Church, Great North Road, Eaton Socon
- River Mill, School Lane, Eaton Socon
- 4-6 St Marys Street, Eynesbury
- 1 St Marys Street, Eynesbury
- The Ferns, Berkley Street, Eynesbury
- 20 St Marys Street, Eynesbury
- 22 St Marys Street, Eynesbury
- Smithy and Stable rear of 15 & 17 South Street
- 19 1 & 2 Brook Street
- Wall Fronting Church View, 29a Church Street
- Farm buildings, Monks Hardwick, Priory Hill
- 10 – 14 Market Square
- Wall Fronting Church View, 29 Church Street
- Wall Fronting Church View, 27 Church Street
- Wall Fronting Church View, land adjacent 27 Church Street
- 28 Cambridge Street

- 27 Cambridge Street.

The St Neots Conservation Area was amended in 2006 and amalgamates the three old Conservation Areas (St Neots, Eynesbury and the Eatons) into one larger one as shown in figure 4 below. The amended Conservation Area also includes large areas of meadow land which form the setting of the town. The area extends northwards to Crosshall and Little Paxton, and south to the A428. The entire Town Centre lies within the Conservation Area. Distinctive areas include the Market Square and riverfront, Island Common and Priory Park. The Conservation Area Character Assessment summarises each of the localities within the Conservation Area as follows.

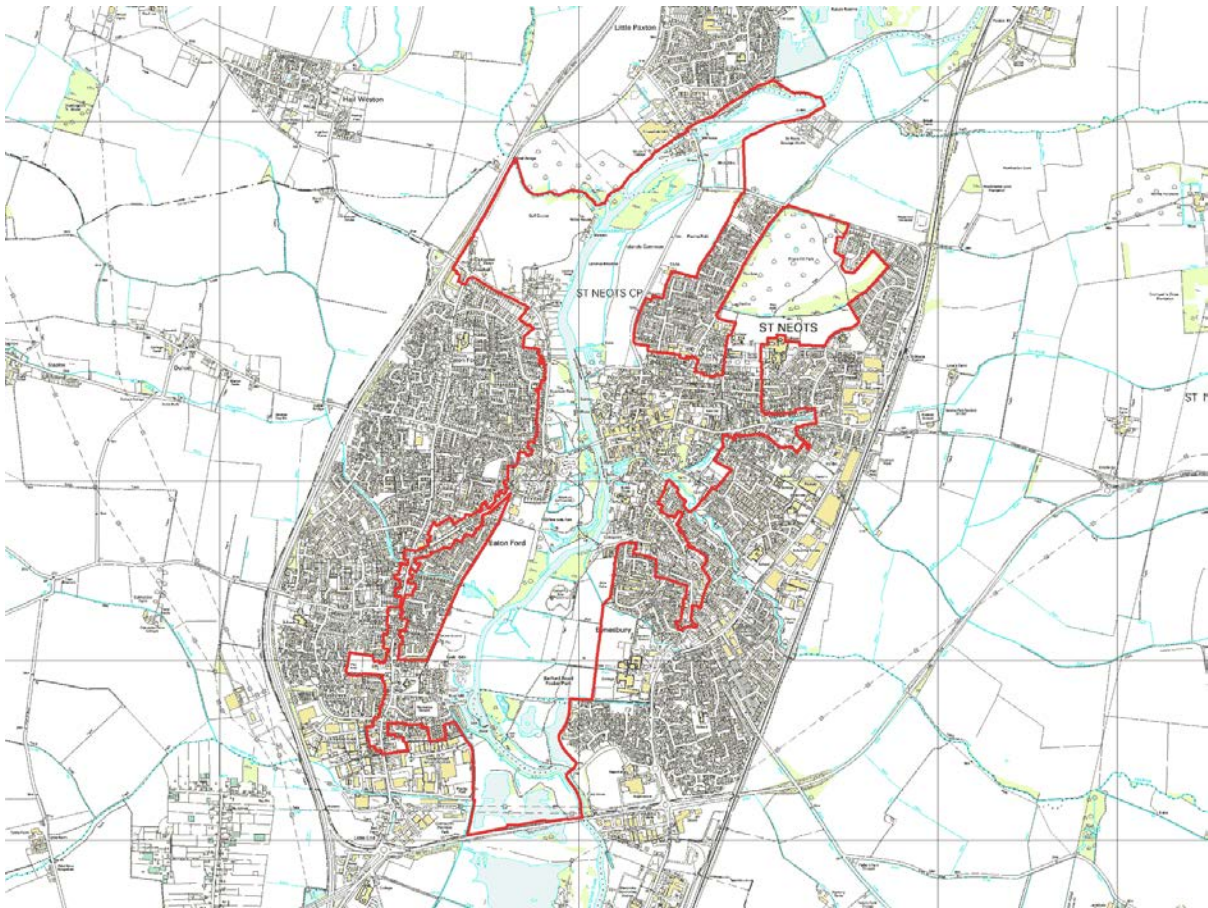


Figure 4. Map of St Neots Conservation Area

The St Neots market square and riverfront are memorable images of the town. The historic architecture is on the scale of other market towns within the district and demonstrates St Neots' importance as a trading and commercial centre from the seventeenth century

onwards. Island Common and Priory Park make a significant contribution to the rural economy. Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century expansion to the north and east of the medieval core are characterised by regular, rectangular street patterns laid out within earlier town enclosures.

Eynesbury retains its village quality although it is surrounded by modern housing development. The area between the Parish Church and village green is particularly memorable. The original twelfth century village had a very open texture and this has not been completely lost. However, the historic settlement is isolated from the rural areas. Social housing was a feature of Eynesbury's early twentieth century morphology.

Eaton Socon and Eaton Form retain a rural quality and Eaton Socon still feels like a village. The northward expansion of the historic core illustrates its past history as a stopover on the Great North Road. The St Neots Road leads the Union Workhouse on its way through Eaton Ford, a hamlet which developed at the bridgehead west of the Ouse crossing point. The river frontage from Crosshall, which was once a small hamlet, to Eaton Ford is significant and accessible meadowland.

The Priory Park Management Plan reports that whilst there are no known conservation designations associated with Priory Park but research has revealed that the park is an important historical site, as it lies at the heart of what was once The Priory Farm, property of St Neots Priory, from which the town evolved.

It is very likely that The Priory Farm came into existence in 1113 when the northern manor of Eynesbury was gifted to the new St Neots Priory. A map drawn up for land owner, Sir Stephen Anderson, in 1757, clearly shows The Priory Farm covering a large area to the east of what is now Huntingdon Road, as well as two fields to the west of the same road. One very large field was called The Priory Field (over 100 acres), which extended well to the north of the present Priory Hill Road. The centre of this field is now Priory Park.

The Priory Farm was eventually bought by Owsley Rowley in 1793. He built Priory Hill House for his family at the top of the hill and laid out parkland around it in 1798, incorporating most of The Priory Field. He appears to have built a new tree-lined avenue to his house (which eventually became Priory Hill Road). Successive generations occupied the house,

which is shown on the First Series 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Map as surrounded by a tree-filled parkland with woodland to the east. There was also a pond to the west of the house.

Priory Hill House and the grounds to the south of Priory Hill Road, were bought by St Neots Urban District Council in the early 1960s. The house was demolished in 1964 to make way for housing, whilst the parkland became the present Priory Park. The parkland to the north of Priory Hill Road became arable land, part of Banks Farm.

Urban Design

St Neots can be split into four character areas. In the North East is St Neots; the historic architecture is on the scale of other Huntingdonshire Market Towns and demonstrates its importance as a trading and commercial centre from the 17th century onwards. Late 19th and early 20th century expansion to the original settlement lay to the north and east of the medieval core. These neighbourhoods are typified by regular, rectangular street patterns laid out within earlier town enclosures. The Market Square is dominated by retail shops and the area around St Marys Church is dominated by residential (cottages and larger houses). The area around Huntingdon Street and New Street is dominated by smaller retail units and commercial premises, in contrast to the area around Riverside Development and Priory Lane which is dominated by commercial premises and a Waitrose store. The outskirts of the main town centre are mainly residential streets.

In the southeast is Eynesbury, which retains its village quality although it is all but surrounded by modern housing development. The original 12th century village had a very open texture and this has not been completely lost. However, the historic settlement is now isolated from the rural context. St Neots Town Centre contains some social housing that was a feature of Eynesbury's early 20th century morphology. The style, materials and layout of this estate are characteristic of the area. The area contains a wide variety of buildings from different ages and of varying status, with small cottages and terraces, larger houses and council housing to the south of the village centre.

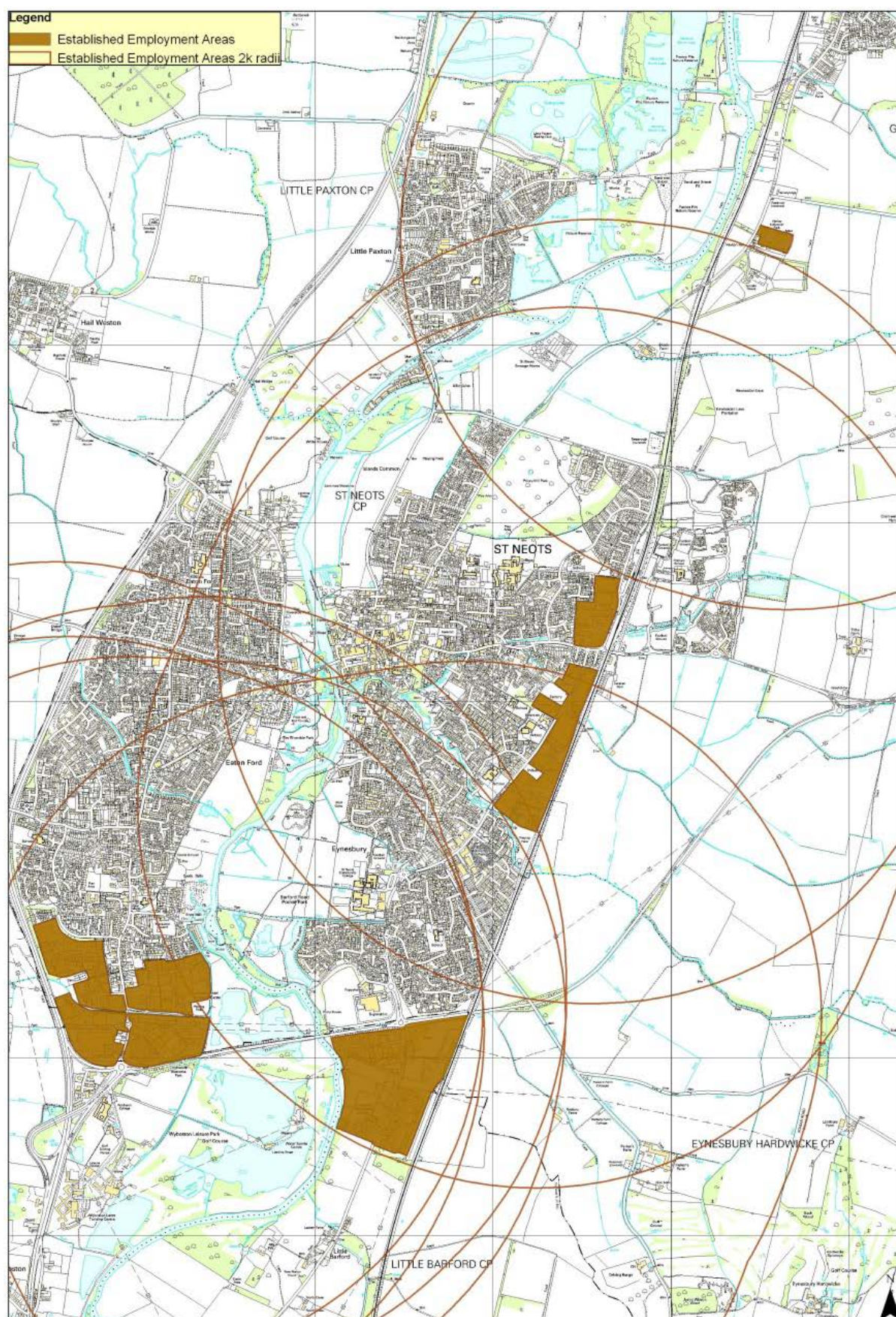
In the northwest and southwest are Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon respectively, which both retain a rural quality. Eaton Socon feels like a village with a Parish Church. The northwest extension of the historic core illustrates its part history as a stopover on the Great North Road. This area includes areas of green space, a range of housing typologies and historic buildings such as the Old Vicarage in Eaton Socon, The Cage and White Horse in Eaton Socon.

Local Employment and Industries

In 2006 11,000 people were employed and the town provided employment opportunities for 54% of its resident employment base. Almost half of residents work locally but there is significant commuting to the rest of the District and to Bedford. In total almost three quarters of residents work within Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, however of the remainder many commute long distances, typically to London.

Employment is largely dependent on manufacturing, retail and wholesale and the public sector, which account for 22% and 23% respectively of the employment base. The proportion of people employed in larger firms is lower than average and there is an above average number of small businesses. However, the four largest employers each employing over 200 people account for 15% of the local employment base.

The largest concentrations of employment activities are near the A428/A1 junction, along the railway line, and within Town Centre. Figure 5 shows the major employment locations in the town. The circles on the map show a 2km distance from each employment site, which shows that the town has good access to employment opportunities. Much of the activity near the A428/A1 junction is recently established and provides an important employment centre together with Wyboston Lakes and the Little Barford power station across the border in Bedfordshire. The area west of the railway line contains a number of large manufacturers but some of this land has become available for redevelopment. The north western part of the town has poorest accessibility to employment opportunities.



There are a range of events held for local businesses, including the Huntingdonshire Chamber which provides a range of informal networking events for local businesses; the Town Centre initiative which provides manufacturing and retail based clubs for local businesses; the Local 601 Club which provides monthly evening networking events for local businesses; and the Huntingdonshire Business Network which provides district wide networking opportunities for local businesses.

In recent years employment growth has been significantly higher than the regional and national averages, however this growth has been largely dependent on the growth of public sector jobs in the town.

The Healthcheck found that a key challenge faced by employers in the town relates to the lack of practical and employment related skills held by school leavers and the locally aging population and shortage of potential replacement labour.

Tourism is limited in St Neots, although the town does have a Tourist Information Office. There are Town Trails in St Neots, Eaton Form and Eaton Socon and a Town Guide. The Public Right of Navigation through St Neots is an important tourism asset. The Healthcheck found that the main constraints to developing the tourism sector are: lack of coach parking, the single crossing across the river and congestion, the out of town location of the train station and the lack of a central hotel.

The Huntingdonshire District Local Investment Framework identified the following economic regeneration projects required in St Neots:

- Regeneration of St Neots Town Centre - the Priory Quarter.
- St Neots Space for Creativity Enterprise Phase 2 (specifically St Mary's Urban Village/ Fire Station site).
- New visitor centre at Paxton Pits
- St Neots Skills Campus (Introduction of carpentry, plumbing and electrical trades training)

Town Centre

The shopping core is focussed along the High Street. The Market Square is an important focal point but sits on the edge of the shopping centre. In 2006 there were 170 retail units in the Town Centre.

The Town Centre lacks larger retail units for comparison stores such as major fashion retailers and department stores but is well represented with smaller units and food stores. The Town Centre has a relatively low level of vacant units in the main shopping areas.

Three convenience supermarkets are located in the town: Waitrose, Marks & Spencers and Somerfield. These lie either within or adjacent to the core shopping area.

The Healthcheck found that there is an opportunity to improve the fashion and food and drink sectors. Also, available retail units are not always suited to the trading requirements of retail operators.

The Town Centre benefits from a major scheme of environmental improvements in the Market Square, the installation of closed circuit television monitoring, a Conservation Area Partnership Scheme and a Town Centre Management Initiative.

The following were the key findings from the St Neots Town Centre Benchmarking Report 2012:

- The proportion of shops (A1) among all ground floor commercial units in the defined town centre of St Neots is above the Huntingdonshire average and is slightly higher than the national average. Units in St Neots are also more likely to be used for food or drink-related uses (A3-A5). The proportion with B1 business use (e.g. offices other than financial and professional services) is below average.
- The level of vacant ground floor units in St Neots is slightly below the district average and is slightly higher than the national average at 9% of all commercial units. This figure relates to 17 units across the defined town centre area.
- The proportion of retailers selling comparison goods is above the national average.
- There are higher proportions of 'key attractors' and multiple traders and fewer independents among shops based in St Neots town centre than national averages.

- The market in St Neots has 26 traders on average, above the national figure.
- Zone A rental values are almost twice the national small town average.
- Footfall figures are slightly higher than the national small town average on both busy (market) and quiet (non-market) days.
- Based on a survey of 13 businesses, firms were less likely than the national average to say that their turnover had decreased compared to the previous year. Responses about profitability were similar to national findings but the companies were less likely to think that turnover would increase over the next 12 months.
- Rental values/property costs were rated highly by firms as among the most negative aspects of having a business in the town compared to the national small town average. Some of the most positive aspects of having a business in the town were potential local customers and the prosperity of the town.
- St Neots is the only town in Huntingdonshire where any businesses said they had suffered from crime over the previous year, with 5 of 13 survey respondents affected. All 5 had suffered from theft with 1 experience of abuse and 2 of criminal damage.
- An online survey of town centre visitors found that shops, car parking, physical appearance and leisure and cultural facilities were among the most negative aspects of the town centre. The ease of walking around the town centre was also described as a negative aspect of the town centre by a relatively high level of respondents (21%). Access to services and convenience were the highest rated positive aspects.

In 2012 there were 167 occupied units within the Town Centre and over half of these (56%) were in retail use. 16% were financial and business services, 8% were cafes, 7% were drinking establishments 5% were take aways, 4% were assembly and leisure and 6% were sui generis.

A sustainable balance of key attractors and multiple names alongside local independent shops is therefore likely to have the greatest positive impact on the vitality and viability of a town. When asked how they rated the variety of shops 46% rated it as poor and 18% rated it as very poor. This is higher than the national small towns average of 36% poor and 9% very poor.

9% of retail units in the Town Centre are vacant, which is slightly more than the national small towns average (8%) and slightly lower than the District average (10%). 1,032 car parking spaces are available in the Town Centre.

When asked about the positive aspects of having a business within the Town Centre 92% said local customers, 75% of businesses surveyed said the prosperity of the town, 67% said car parking and 58% said potential tourist customers. When asked about the negative aspects 54% said car parking, 54% said rental values and 31% said competition from the internet.

The following suggestions were made by businesses as part of the Benchmarking Report to improve the economic performance of the Town Centre:

- Close High St.
- Free car parking.
- A better mix of independent retail shops.
- Less charity shops.
- Bring in bigger, national retailers.
- Lower business rates.
- New Road Bridge.
- Improved road access.
- Redevelopment of river area.
- Encourage development of larger retail units in town centre.
- Free car parking incentives for small businesses to start up retail shops.

The percentage of people that visit the Town Centre for comparison shopping is slightly higher than the District and national averages. Accessing services is the most common reason for visiting the Town Centre. The majority of people surveyed travel to the Town Centre by car (62%).

31% of people said that they rate the physical appearance of the Town Centre as poor and 5% rated it very poor. This is higher than the national small towns average of 21% and 4% respectively.

The leisure and cultural offer in the Town Centre was rated as poor by 51% of respondents and very poor by 11%. This compares to the national small towns average of 37% and 8%.

In terms of the positive aspects of the Town Centre 78% referred to access to services, 64% said convenience, 58% said ease of walking around and 47% said markets. In terms of the negative aspects 59% said the shops, 43% said car parking, 42% said physical appearance and 40% said leisure facilities.

Huntingdonshire District Council commissioned a retail study, which was published in 2013. Within the study is a section on St Neots Town Centre. The study states that the findings from the RTP 2010 study are still relevant and the report includes the following extract from the RTP 2010 report:

“We have not identified any major causes for concern in relation to St Neots Town Centre. Although St Neots has slipped in the UK centre rankings, this reflects the trend experienced by other centres of a similar size. The town centre's convenience sector offer is healthy and the town centre's vacancy rate remains significantly below the UK average.

Although the number of published operator requirements has decreased recently, again this reflects a national trend, and some prominent names appear to have an interest in St Neots including Monsoon and Fat Face. If retailers of that calibre were to open in St Neots it would help to bolster the town centre's fashion retail offer, which is probably the centre's main qualitative deficiency. Overall, however, we consider that St Neots is generally performing well under current market/economic conditions.”

St Neots Town Centre was placed 511th in the Management Horizons Retail Rankings in 2008, a fall of 90 places from 421st in 2004. The 2011 Venuescore Rankings (which has replaced Management Horizons and has a slightly different methodology) showed that in 2011 St Neots Town Centre was ranked 527th nationally, a further fall from the 2004 and 2008 positions.

The comparison goods market share of expenditure for the town as a whole from its catchment area is over 50%, which is reasonable considering the town's proximity to Cambridge and Bedford. The town as a whole has a strong retention rate for convenience goods with over 85% of expenditure retained within the town. Table 3, below, is taken from

the study and shows the diversity of uses within the Town Centre as of January 2012. The percentage of outlets and floorspace in St Neots Town Centre is comparable to the national average. The greatest difference is retail services, with St Neots Town Centre being above the national average. Positively the percentage of vacant units and floorspace is less than the national average.

	No. of outlets	% of total	National average (%)	Floorspace sqm	% of total	National average (%)
Comparison	59	29.95	32.93	11,827	31.03	36.35
Convenience	17	8.63	8.03	7,079	18.57	14.43
Retail service	38	19.29	13.63	4,562	11.97	7.25
Leisure service	41	20.81	21.96	8,584	22.52	22.76
Financial & business service	22	11.17	10.96	3,010	7.9	8.34
Vacant outlet	20	10.15	12.16	3,057	8.02	10.10

Table 3. Diversity of uses in St Neots Town Centre as of January 2012

The latest Focus retailer requirement figures for St Neots obtained in January 2013 show that there are only 3 requirements: Cool Trader, Holland and Barrett, and Snap Fitness. The low overall number of specific requirements is indicative of the current weak state of the retail market.

In footfall terms St Neots Town Centre has performed poorly compared to the District's other centres. The footfall levels within St Neots Town Centre show a consistent decline between 2006 and 2010 with a marginal rise in 2011 followed by a further 3.7% decline between 2011 and 2012, despite the population of the town increasing during this period.

The study concluded that the Town Centre is performing well and is on the whole a vital and viable Town Centre. However, traffic is a problem and the decline in footfall is a concern. The study concluded that improving the attractiveness of the Town Centre will improve its vitality and viability.

The study found that there is capacity for 2800m² of retail space within the Eastern Expansion; 1118m² convenience and 1660 comparison. The Huntingdonshire District Draft Local Plan allocates 4000m² of retail space within the Eastern Expansion.

Community Infrastructure

Local GP practices are at physical capacity and NHS Cambridge is exploring the possibility of providing temporary accommodation to relieve pressure on existing facilities. There is no hospital in St Neots and the nearest hospital is in Huntingdon.

The following is a list of the community infrastructure facilities in St Neots.

Schools

- Crosshall Infant School;
- Crosshall Junior School;
- Priory Park Infant School;
- Priory Junior School;
- Middlefield Community Primary School;
- St Mary's Primary School;
- Winhills Primary School;
- Little Paxton Primary School;
- Eynesbury Church of England Primary School;
- Bushmead Primary School;
- The Roundhouse Primary School (Loves Farm)
- Samuel Pepys Special School;
- Longsands Secondary School
- Ernulf Secondary School

Primary Care Services

- Almond Road Surgery;

- Cedar House Surgery;
- Eaton Socon Health Centre;

Community Centres and similar venues

- The Priory Centre;
- St Neots community centre;
- St Neots Library;
- St Neots Museum;
- Numerous school halls and churches.

Sports and leisure facilities

- St Neots Leisure Centre;
- St Neots Rugby Club;
- St Neots Golf Club;
- St Neots table tennis club;
- Ten-pin bowling complex;
- Little Paxton Sailing Club;
- Eaton Socon Cricket Club;
- St Neots Football club and training facilities;
- Eynesbury Rovers Club (football)
- Eaton Socon Football Club
- Eaton Ford Indoor Bowling Club
- St Neots Tennis Club
- St Neots Rowing Club;

- Numerous parks and play areas, including Riverside Park which hosts a number of events including music;
- Other smaller facilities.

The Huntingdonshire District Local Investment Framework identified the following social infrastructure requirements for St Neots under a high growth scenario:

- 11 x new 52-place Nurseries
- 2 x new Children's Centres
- 3 x new 2FE Primary School
- 2 x new 1FE Primary School
- 1 x new 6FE Secondary School
- Extend 1 current Secondary School
- 2 x new 4GP Primary and Social Care Facilities
- 3 x new Small multi-purpose community facility (300sq.m each)
- 1 x new Small Community Library (350sq.m)
- 23.4ha Outdoor sports, pitches, courts and greens
- 4.6ha Allotments and community gardens
- 26.1ha Informal open space
- 3.7ha Children and young people's play space
- 1 x new multi-purpose leisure facility with sports hall and pool
- New Safer Neighbourhood Team Space (100 sq.m) to accommodate SNT consisting of 6 Officers

The Cemetery is nearly full. It is estimated that it will have reached capacity by 2021.

In 1956, St Neots Urban District Council decided that money should be raised for a pool by public subscription. The St Neots and District Swimming Pool Fund Association was formed in 1958 and in the same year the Carnival Committee offered to divert its funds raised to the pool project. In March 1958 St Neots Urban District Council agreed to act as Trustees of the fund. The County Council agreed to provide the land adjacent to Priory Park. In 1959 the Swimming Pool Trust was set up and the funds held by the Urban District Council were transferred to it. In 1960 St Neots Swimming Pool Society Limited was formed (company

number 661247) with a share capital of £5,000. The company was incorporated in 1960 and dissolved on 21 November 1974. The pool was built by Lindum Limited of Lincoln in 1961 at a cost of £27,500. The money was raised £6,666 grant from the Ministry of Education, £6,799 from the St Neots and District Swimming Pool Fund Association and £2,044 from the Carnival Committee. A loan for £10,000 was taken over 30 years. Remaining money came from public subscription for shares of the limited company at 10s each raising £1,323 10shillings. The pool was opened by Sir David Renton MP in summer 1961 and attended by the country's top swimmers. In 1972 with another loss forecast the management committee began the process to transfer the pool to the UDC, legal complications meant this process did not complete until 1974 when the UDC had been absorbed into the newly formed Huntingdonshire District Council.

HDC continued to manage the pool for several years before transferring ownership to a new Swimming Pool Trust whose trustees were the members of St Neots Town Council. A debt of £28,000 had accrued to HDC for management of the pool which remains outstanding. To protect the pool from being sold by St Neots Town Council, Huntingdonshire District Council included a transfer term that in the event of disposal proceeds would be split between Town & HDC. Following the closure of the pool HDC have formally agreed not to enforce this clause.

The pool was closed in 2003, several different reasons have been given for this but the ultimate reason was lack of cash flow for essential repairs.

The 50 metre open air swimming pool is was demolished and filled in in 2005.

Figure 6, below, plots the locations of doctors surgeries, primary schools and food shops in St Neots and the circles show a reasonable walking distance from these services. The more overlapping circles that cover an areas the more accessible it is to a range of services. This map shows that in St Neots there is generally very good access to these key services, with the greatest accessibility in the centre of the town.

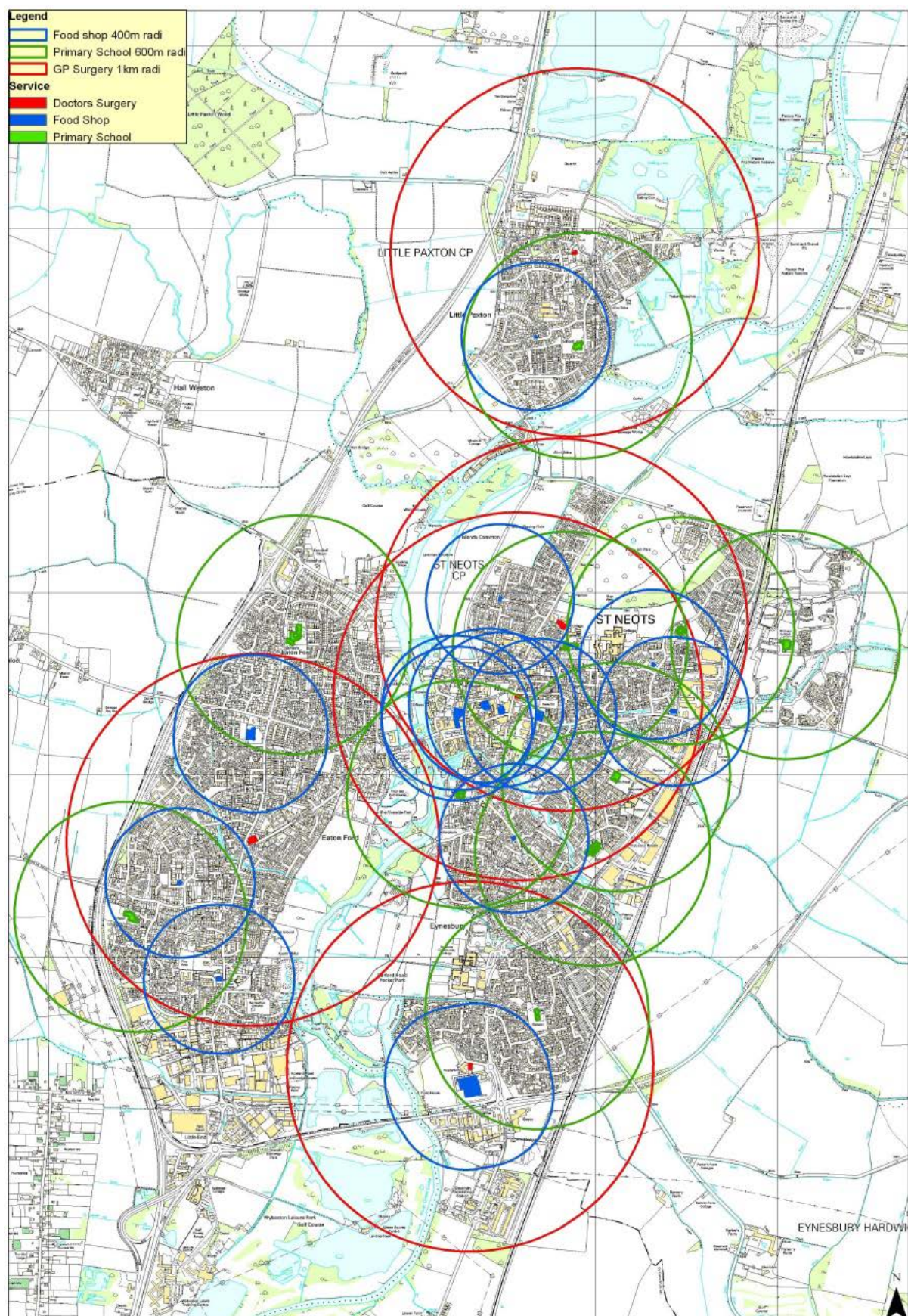


Figure 6. Doctors surgeries, food shops and primary schools and their catchment areas.

Education

Early Year and Childcare

There are insufficient premises within Loves Farm development as the population of 0-5 year olds has exceeded the planned availability of early years' provision. The County Council is collaborating with Huntingdonshire District Council to implement plans for dedicated early years space within a new Community Hub.

In addition to the early years and childcare spaces in each of the new primary schools, 2 x 100 place day nurseries will need to be provided to meet the needs of Loves Farm 2 and Wintringham Park developments.

Primary school provision

There is currently limited Reception year group capacity in St Neots. This is located in Bushmead Primary School to the west of St Neots and Winhills Primary School to the east of the town.

The Round House Primary School has recently been expanded from 1FE (210 places) to 2FE (240 places).

Loves Farm 2 will generate the need for a new 2FE (240 places) primary school.

Wintringham Park will require 2 primary schools of at least 2FE each (840 places total). At the higher end of the pupil forecast range additional primary school numbers could reach 940 pupils so the County Council have indicated that one of the sites will need to be big enough to provide flexibility to expand if required.

Secondary school provision

Separate planning applications have been submitted for Wintringham Park and Loves Farm 2 with 2800 and 1250 dwellings respectively (total 4050).

Subsequently, the latest version of Huntingdonshire District's Local Plan was issued on 31 May 2013 for consultation. It refers to approximately 3700 dwellings on the proposed St Neots Eastern Expansion site which encompasses Loves Farm 2 and Wintringham Park.

Two secondary schools, Ernulf and Longsands, both Academies, provide for the 11-18 age range in St Neots. The schools operate on a federation arrangement with an Executive Head and single governing body.

The key issues relating to future secondary school pupil numbers in St Neots are as follows:

Forecasts suggest that the number of secondary aged pupils living in the St Neots catchments will fall over the next five years, then rise again reflecting the ageing through of

larger birth cohorts, with numbers of 11 year olds reaching around 16FE (2400) FROM 2019/20.

Based on the two schools' current combined PAN of 522 (17.4FE) there are currently sufficient secondary school places across St Neots should all catchment pupils wish to attend a local school.

An additional 3700 homes are planned at Loves Farm and Wintringham Park, to the east of the railway. These will bring a further 4-6FE of secondary pupils to the area, raising the potential total to 20-22FE. On current arrangements, there would not be sufficient capacity for all these pupils within the town's schools. An additional 2.5-4.5 could be required. However, if the recent proportion of 91% of the areas pupils continue to attend the two town secondary schools, then the school roll will be approximately 18-20FE in the long term.

Feasibility work undertaken to date indicates that Longsands could be extended to 12FE, excluding sixth form, and Ernulf to 10FE, excluding sixth form, providing a total of 22FE which would be sufficient to meet demand.

Post 16 Provision

Within the Huntingdonshire area 16-19 Partnership there are a sufficient number of post 16 places available. An expansion of provision is not required. However, with the proposed expansion of the two secondary schools, rationalisation of post-16 provision within the town may need to follow.

Special School Provison

Pressure on the two existing special schools in Huntingdonshire is building and more special schools will be required given the proposed St Neots Eastern Expansion.

St Neots Healthcheck

The St Neots Healthcheck forms a very important part of the evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan. It has been referred to throughout this evidence base document and considerably data and information has been taken from the Healthcheck. In this final section the vision set out in the Healthcheck is presented. It is a very detailed vision and numerous objectives have been derived from the vision. This vision and objectives will heavily influence the vision and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

“Family – St Neots: a place for all ages

- The family dynamic is missing from the population of St Neots, it is not seen as a town to move to and raise children with supporting infrastructure and a varied leisure/entertainment/retail offer that would retain all age groups.
- A higher visibility of families in St Neots could help tackle issues of anti-social behaviour and night-time drinking which currently make the town centre off-putting to certain age groups, and provide a much needed customer base for improved retail opportunities and a varied leisure to offer alongside the existing licensed premises.
- In 2026 St Neots could be seen as the town to bring up a young family with quality homes, schools and play facilities....

Longevity - St Neots: a place for tomorrow

- St Neots should also be a place to stay and move to after education and university, so encouraging the next generation of families to develop. This means improving the employment offer either in St Neots or accessible from St Neots to stem the drain of talented people to Cambridge, Peterborough and other areas.
- In 2026 St Neots could be seen as the town to move to after college or university with quality jobs and a vibrant leisure and entertainment offer...

Diversity – St Neots: a place to live, work, shop and enjoy

- St Neots has a unique setting and feel as a market town which means it should be the place of choice for people to move to, work in, visit and enjoy. Many treasures of St Neots

are hidden or only known of to 'true' locals. This perception needs to be countered so that the opportunities for new homes & jobs, new and improved community facilities, improved transport infrastructure, new leisure and entertainment choices are enjoyed by both existing and new communities.

- In 2026 St Neots could be seen as the pre-eminent Market town in Huntingdonshire catering for all needs and tastes through a critical mass of opportunities and facilities which are not matched elsewhere in the District....

Environmental / Green – St Neots: a place where the old meets the new

- The Environment of St Neots is one of its unique selling points. The sense of rurality is incredibly attractive to both existing and new residents. The built heritage and Market Town status provides a sense of importance and distinction, while the River and waterfront setting provide aspirational, leisure and cultural opportunities,
- The Environment in its widest sense is also an intrinsic part of St Neots' future, The Eco-Quarter will be an exemplar of sustainable design, building and living; while the projects which integrate the Eco-Quarter with the existing built-up areas will ensure that the benefits of sustainability can be enjoyed by everyone.
- In 2026 St Neots could lead the way in best-practice sustainability projects and interventions which ensure that the unique qualities and assets of St Neots are preserved for the generations to come..."

Evidence base documents

Action for Market Towns (2013) Market Town Benchmarking: St Neots 2012 Report. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Business%20and%20Economic%20Development%20Documents/St%20Neots%20Benchmarking%202012.pdf>

CABE (2007) Paved with gold: the real value of good street design. <http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/Documents/Documents/Publications/CABE/paved-with-gold-summary.pdf>

Cambridgeshire County Council (2013) Cambridgeshire Festival of Cycling 2013.

Cambridgeshire Insight (2012) Strategic Housing Market Assessment. <http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/current-version>

Deloitte (2013) Huntingdonshire Retail Study 2013. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/huntingdonshire-retail-study-2013-and-retail-provision-paper.pdf>

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2013) Policy: Reducing and managing waste. <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-and-managing-waste>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2005) Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-the-future-delivering-uk-sustainable-development-strategy>

EDAW & AECOM (on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council) (2009) St Neots Healthcheck: Stage 3 Final

Report. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Document%20s/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/St%20Neots%20Healthcheck%20Stage%203%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Environment Agency (2011) Great Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan Summary Report. <http://a0768b4a8a31e106d8b0-50dc802554eb38a24458b98ff72d550b.r19.cf3.rackcdn.com/gean0111btjl-e-e.pdf>

Friends of Sudbury Meadow (2013) Sudbury Meadow: Bringing wildlife closer to home. <http://www.sudburymeadow.org.uk/>

Home (2013) Property Asking Price Report for St Neots - September 2006 to November 2013. http://www.home.co.uk/guides/asking_prices_report.htm?location=st_neots&all=1

Huntingdonshire District Council (201?) Barford Road Pocket Park. http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Parks%20and%20Open%20Spaces%20documents/barford_road_leaflet%20%282%29.pdf

Huntingdonshire District Council (2011) Buildings at Risk Register. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Listed%20building%20documents/BAR%20Report%202011.pdf>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2009) Core Strategy. http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/core_strategy_final.pdf

Huntingdonshire District Council (2013) Draft Local Plan to 2036. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Planning/Planning%20Policy/Pages/LocalPlan%20to%2036.aspx>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2013) Environmental Capacity Study: St Neots Spatial Planning Area. <http://consult.huntsdc.gov.uk/portal/pp/hlp2036/st3ecs>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2012) Housing Strategy 2012 – 2015. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Housing%20documents/Housing%20Strategy/Housing-Strategy-2012-2015.pdf>

Huntingdonshire District Council (1995) Huntingdonshire Local Plan. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Planning/Planning%20Policy/Pages/Local%20Plan%201995%20and%20Alteration%202002.aspx>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2002) Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration. http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Huntingdonshire%20Local%20Plan/part1_combined.pdf

Huntingdonshire District Council (2011) Local Development Framework: Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/Developer%20Contributions%20SPD.pdf>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2006) Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment and Audit. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/SGS3%20Open%20Space%20Sports%20and%20Recreation%20Needs%20Assessment.pdf>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2008) Priory Park Management Plan 2008-2013. http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Operations/priory_park_management_plan_2008-2013.pdf

Huntingdonshire District Council (2013) Riverside Park. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Parks%20and%20Countryside/St%20Neots%20Parks%20and%20Countryside%20Sites/Pages/Riverside%20Park.aspx>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2013) St Neots. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Community%20and%20People/Neighbourhood-village/Towns%20and%20Villages/Pages/St%20Neots.aspx>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2010) St Neots Eastern Expansion Urban Design Framework. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Planning/Urban%20Design/St%20Neots/Pages/StNeotsEasternExpansionUrbanDesignFramework2010.aspx>

Huntingdonshire District Council (2006) St Neots Conservation Area Character Assessment. http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/St%20Neots%20Conservation%20Area%20Review/Character_Assessment%28a%29.pdf

Huntingdonshire District Council's Countryside Services (2006) The Meadows of St Neots' Green Corridor. [http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Parks%20and%20Open%20Spaces%20documents/green_corridor_leaflet%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Parks%20and%20Open%20Spaces%20documents/green_corridor_leaflet%20(2).pdf)

Hyder Consulting (UK) Limited on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Management Partnership (2012) St Neots Surface Water Management Plan—Detailed Assessment and Options Appraisal Report. <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/89836306-CF51-4038-B59E-176DD5899CAB/0/5101UA002163BMR01StNeotsSWMPReportFINALPart1.pdf>

Levett-Therivel and URS Scott Wilson (2011) 'DIY SA': Sustainability Appraisal (including strategic environmental assessment) of Neighbourhood Plans. <http://www.levett-therivel.co.uk/DIYSA.pdf>

Locality (2012) Quick Guide to Neighbourhood Planning. <http://locality.org.uk/resources/quick-guide-neighbourhood-planning/>

Locality (2012) Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide. <http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Roadmap-worksheets-map-May-13.pdf>

Office for National Statistics (2011) Neighbourhood Statistics. <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadAreaSearch.do?a>

[=7&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1381151389359&enc=1&areaSearchText=st+neots&areaSearchType=14&extendedList=true&searchAreas=](#)

Open Spaces Society (2012) Local Green Space Designation. <http://www.oss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/C20-Local-Green-Space-Designation.pdf>

Secretary of State (2007) Direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 policies contained in Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995 and Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration 2001. <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/HDCCMS/Documents/Planning%20Documents/PDF%20Documents/Local%20Development%20Framework/direction%20schedule%20of%20saved%20policies%20huntingdonshire%20lp%201995%20alteration%202001.pdf>

St Neots Town Council (2013) St Neots Town Council – Response to the Draft District Local Plan. <http://www.stneots-tc.gov.uk/2013/07/town-councils-response-to-draft-local-plan/>