

Three Rivers District Council

Sub-Committee Report

8 October 2025

PART I

**Settlement Appraisal 2025
(DoF)**

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the draft 2025 Settlement Appraisal (Appendix 1) prepared to assist with the formulation of the Local Plan.
- 1.2 The report and draft Settlement Appraisal are only for noting at this stage as further work is required to be undertaken.

2 Background

- 2.1 The settlement pattern of Three Rivers is reflective of its close proximity to London; a spatially dense network of villages and small towns, largely separated by the Green Belt that has prevented coalescence. However, sustainable transport and development has its challenges, due to the predominantly low-density housing stock, little opportunity for development in the urban areas and often narrow/minor road network upon leaving the built-up areas.
- 2.2 This appraisal seeks to characterise and categorise the settlements within the district. It includes the grouping of the settlements into a named hierarchy based on a mix of access to services, sustainable transport and population.

3 Settlement Appraisal 2025

- 3.1 This document has been produced to support the council in its strategy to promote a sustainable pattern of development and is assessed against the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) and latest Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It should be noted that the primary purpose of this evidence is to support local plan preparation, however, it may also be used to assist in decision making.
- 3.2 The NPPF sets out that plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet the development needs of their area. The PPG identifies the importance of a settlement hierarchy and in particular that a wide range of settlements can play a role in delivering sustainable development in rural areas.
- 3.3 As well as undertaking an exercise to inform the sustainability of settlements, this document was considered an appropriate vehicle for an update in settlement terminology, partly as a result of recent clarification in the planning policy guidance on the merging of settlements in the Green Belt. Under the guidance on Purpose B to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another, it has now been clarified that this purpose relates to towns and not villages. Therefore, clarification on the definition of a town or village was considered appropriate.
- 3.4 This study was subsequently undertaken with intention of supporting the above guidance, by keeping our settlement information up to date and redefining our settlement hierarchy to make it relate to national policy more clearly and therefore aid our local plan work and decision-making.

- 3.5 To assess the sustainability of a settlement, the study assigned 8 key services to each settlement. A maximum score of 3 was given to a service within the settlement, with a sliding scale going away from the settlement boundary
- 3.6 The second part was to assess the transport options in respect of road infrastructure (higher the highest road classification, the higher the score) the bus service scored on regularity of service and whether there was a train station (scored the same way as the services. The combination of these scores were then tallied, and depending on how well the settlements scored, they were categorised as 'Very Good' 'Good' 'Fair' or 'Poor'. The full methodology is within the main document in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 A combination of population and sustainability score was used to create our initial settlement hierarchy terminology. Although generally the higher the population, the better the sustainability categorisation, or vice-versa, this was not always the case. Some smaller settlements by population performed better on sustainability than would be expected and some larger settlements scored lower. The highest three categories for the settlement hierarchy are 'Principal Town' Small Town/Large Suburban Settlement and Large Village/Suburban Settlement. This reflects the distinctive geography of the area where we have many settlements that are contiguous with London or Watford and difficult to term strictly as a separate town or village.
- 3.8 Initial findings are that the settlements scoring 'Very Good' in sustainability terms are Rickmansworth, Chorleywood, South Oxhey, Croxley Green and Leavesden and Garston. The Principal Town is Rickmansworth and the Small Towns are Chorleywood, South Oxhey, Croxley Green and Abbots Langley.
- 3.9 It must however be highlighted that this document is a work in progress. The results are draft only and scoring or thresholds for categories may be subject to revision. Also, only settlements as far down as what were considered to be Service Centres (Tier 3) have been assessed so far. All other settlements with 100 residents and above will be assessed in the near future.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the council's agreed policy and the report has been undertaken in-house, so there are no external budget implications.

5 Financial, Legal, Staffing, Equal Opportunities, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

- 5.1 None specific.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 That the Local Plan Sub-Committee note this report and the draft findings of the settlement appraisal document.

7 Background Papers

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

Planning Practice Guidance (2024)

8 **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Settlement Appraisal (2025)

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