

## The AVDC settlement hierarchy: a critique

The settlements in the Vale of Aylesbury have been grouped in a hierarchy since at least the Local Plan of 2004<sup>1</sup>. This note describes the versions of the hierarchy published in 2007, 2009 and 2012, and explains why the assessment of Great Horwood as a 'large village' is anomalous.

### The 2007 settlement hierarchy and the 2009 review

An explanation of the rationale for the 2007 hierarchy may be found in the Core Strategy (CS)<sup>2</sup>:

#### *"6.5 Third Tier Settlements*

*6.5.1 The larger more sustainable villages make up the third tier settlements. These settlements generally have a population of at least 2,000 or more, or where this is not the case, have been included in this tier because of the range of key services that they provide and because of their public transport links. The third tier settlements will be the focus for more limited growth which will be largely based on supporting the surrounding rural areas."*

Nineteen settlements were identified for the third tier (large villages), and they are listed in Policy CS2, Spatial Strategy for Aylesbury Vale. A more detailed explanation for the allocation of settlements was given in the Review of the Rural Settlement Hierarchy of 2009 (RSH)<sup>3 4</sup>:

*5.14 It is noted in Section 3 that the Core Strategy – Preferred Options identified 19 of the settlements included in this study as more sustainable 'third tier' settlements as listed below.*

<i>Aston Clinton</i>	<i>Long Crendon</i>	<i>Waddesdon</i>
<i>Bierton</i>	<i>Newton Longville</i>	<i>Weston Turville</i>
<i>Brill</i>	<i>Padbury</i>	<i>Wing</i>
<i>Cheddington</i>	<i>Pitstone</i>	<i>Wingrave,</i>
<i>Edlesborough</i>	<i>Steeple Claydon</i>	<i>Whitchurch</i>
<i>Great Horwood</i>	<i>Stoke Mandeville</i>	
<i>Grendon Underwood</i>	<i>Stone</i>	

*5.15 These 'third tier' settlements were selected on the basis of an assessment which took account of population; range of services available; schools; and bus service frequency. Settlements which qualified for selection were those which had a population of over 2,000 and those with a smaller population but which had a school/Post Office, doctor, library (including a mobile service), a combined school or better, and a frequent or regular bus service. Some additional settlements were added which included:*

- A frequent bus service, three of the services identified (shop/PO, pub, doctor, library)*

1 Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan: Written Statement, January 2004

2 AVDC Core Strategy Development Plan Document: Preferred Options, July 2007

3 AVDC Review of Rural Settlement Hierarchy, January 2009; Local Development Framework Background Paper

4 RSH also proposed that third-tier and fourth-tier settlements be relabelled as fourth-tier and fifth-tier respectively, in order to retain only Buckingham as second-tier and label Haddenham, Wendover and Winslow as third-tier. To avoid confusion, the terms "large village" and "small village" will be used.

*and a combined school or better; or*

- *All the services identified with at least a daily bus service; or*
- *A frequent bus service with at least two of the four services identified.*

It is not the case, however, that Great Horwood meets the criteria specified for inclusion as a large village, either in terms of population or of available services. The population criterion is based upon the population of the parish containing the settlement (this is not stated explicitly, but a cut-off population of 2000 for settlements rather than parishes would exclude nearly all the settlements listed). Parish population estimates (to the nearest hundred) for large villages are given in the following table.<sup>5</sup>

Stoke Mandeville	5800	Waddesdon	2100
Aston Clinton	3600	Newton Longville	1800
Weston Turville	3100	Cheddington	1800
Pitstone	3000	Grendon Underwood	1700
Wing	2900	Wingrave	1500
Edlesborough	2700	Brill	1200
Stone	2700	<b>Great Horwood</b>	<b>1000</b>
Long Crendon	2500	Whitchurch	900
Steeple Claydon	2400	Padbury	900
Bierton	2100		

The mean parish population for large villages is therefore 2300, and the median population is 2100.

As far as services are concerned, Great Horwood has a combined school and two pubs, but does not have a doctor, a shop/Post Office or a library (fixed or mobile). Its bus service is neither frequent nor regular.

Indeed, RSH acknowledges that Great Horwood does not meet the criteria for a large village, but it makes the mysterious observation:

*5.17 In addition, Great Horwood was added to the list of third tier settlements although it did not meet the selection criteria above because it was considered to be in an area of geographical need due to a lack of proximity to a large settlement.*

It is difficult to know what to make of this. Part of it is plainly false: Great Horwood is two miles from Winslow, a second tier settlement with a population of 4400 and a range of shops. The other part is obscure: in geographical need of what? In need of village services, evidently; but why this should justify the assessment of Great Horwood as a 'large village' is baffling.

Objections were made to this assessment:

#### 4.6 Further representations from Parish Councils and others questioned the adequacy

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics, Mid-2010 Population Estimates for Parishes in England and Wales. It is ONS policy to publish population estimates rounded to at least the nearest hundred persons.

*of services available in particular settlements to justify their proposed inclusion as third tier settlements. Long Crendon, Padbury, Great Horwood and Wingrave with Rowsham Parish Councils each considered that their main settlements should not be included; Stewkley and Little Horwood Parish Councils also expressed the view that Great Horwood should not be a third tier settlement.*

The objection by Stewkley is significant. The population of Stewkley is 1900; the services available are slightly better than in Great Horwood although there is an even poorer bus service; and the nearest large settlement is about three miles away. Yet Stewkley is not classified as a large village. Unaccountably, though, RSH concluded:

*5.23 Other representations on the Core Strategy – Preferred Options concerned the inclusion of Wingrave and Great Horwood as third tier settlements (see para 4.6). It is concluded, however, that the former meets the criteria for inclusion. It is also considered that the reasons for including Great Horwood set out in para 5.17, above, remain valid.*

As no further reason was given, one can only conclude that the classification of Great Horwood as a large village in RSH (and, indeed, in CS) was arbitrary and irrational.

### **The 2012 settlement hierarchy**

An updated settlement hierarchy was prepared for the VAP in 2012 (SHA)<sup>6</sup>. This used a modified assessment scheme, and the category corresponding to a third-tier settlement in CS and a fourth-tier settlement in RSH was explicitly labelled "large village". In this new classification 26 villages, including Great Horwood, are listed as large villages. However the inclusion of Great Horwood in this category is again based on a flawed assessment.

As with previous assessments, that used in SHA was based upon a combination of size and the availability of services. For this assessment the settlement population (rather than the parish population) was used; the assessment of services was based upon eleven key criteria<sup>7</sup>.

*5.10 In developing a criteria of what is a larger village the settlements were defined as typically having a population of 1,000 - 2000 and have 6 to 9 of the key criteria (within 4 miles of a service centre, employment for 20 units or more, food store, pub, post office, GP, village hall, recreation facilities, primary school, hourly or more bus service and train station).*

*5.11 It is reasonable to assume that those settlements which have at least 8 out of the 11 key criteria have a good sustainability and therefore can clearly be classified as a 'larger village'. Those settlements which have between 5 to 7 of the 11 key facilities were less clear and therefore focused more on the qualitative assessment for assessing the information from Fact Packs, notes from meetings with parish councils and officer site visits.*

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6 Settlement Hierarchy Assessment for the Vale of Aylesbury Plan Strategy, September 2012

7 SHA, p 18-19

The populations of the settlements classified as large villages are listed below<sup>8</sup>.

Aston Clinton	2769	Waddesdon	1266
Wing	2169	Tingewick	1094
Long Crendon	2122	Marsh Gibbon*	993
Pitstone	1999	Maids Moreton	901
Steeple Claydon	1971	Brill	899
Stoke Mandeville	1959	Quinton	890
Weston Turville	1930	Stoke Hammond	866
Stone	1926	Whitchurch	859
Newton Longville*	1876	Padbury	808
Stewkley	1760	Soulbury*	708
Edlesborough	1708	Gawcott*	704
Cheddington	1706	<b>Great Horwood</b>	<b>670</b>
Wingrave	1426	Grendon Underwood	592

\* for these four settlements only the parish population was available

The mean population for large villages is therefore 1407, and the median population is 1346.

It can be seen that, in terms of village population, the inclusion of Great Horwood as a large village is at best marginal. Indeed, several "small villages" have larger or comparable populations<sup>9</sup>.

Bierton	1192	North Marston	740
Oakley	1048	Ickford	732*
Great Brickhill	866*	Buckland	721
Marsworth	801*	Dagnall	660

\* for these three settlements only the parish population was available

As far as services are concerned, the assessment of Great Horwood under four of the eleven key criteria is either wrong or contentious, as follows:

***Food Stores (super markets, local stores (bakery, butchers) and garage shops):***

***1 (garage)***

This is incorrect. The garage in Great Horwood carries out vehicle repairs; it is not a petrol station, and has not sold food for at least the last thirty years. The point under this heading should be removed.

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8 SHA, Appendix A

9 SHA, Appendix A

***Recreation ground/playing fields (including football pitches, bowling green, cricket pitches, children's play grounds & skate parks):***

0

This is incorrect. There is a football pitch, a cricket pitch and a children's playground. A point should be added under this heading.

***Post office:***

1 (*Part time*)

This is contentious. The description "part time" suggests a post office open perhaps three days a week, or mornings only. In fact the post office in Great Horwood is open for just three hours a week. As the rationale for using the availability of a post office as a key criterion was

*Post offices are a key community facility offering a range of services and facilities.*

and as a point has already been added for the availability of a village hall as a key facility (the post office sets up each Wednesday morning in the village hall), adding a second point for just 7% of a full-time post office amounts to double counting.

***Number of Employment Units (B-class uses)***

33

This is contentious. The rationale for using employment as a key criterion was given as

*Local employment opportunities may reduce people's need to travel by car and local businesses can provide economic benefits to their local community as employees may spend more within the area, consequently helping to maintain local shops and services.*

but most of the employment units counted under this heading are not in the settlement at all: they are in Greenway Business Park to the south. The road from the village to the business park has been closed to both pedestrians and vehicle traffic since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001, and access from the village can be attained only by driving 1km along the road to Winslow (there is no footpath or cycle path and no bus stop). As already mentioned there are no local shops and few other services. The employment units in Greenway Business Park therefore do not contribute to the benefits expected for this criterion, and it is not appropriate to add a point under this heading.

Taking account of the considerations above, the assessment should have given five points for key criteria to Great Horwood, rather than seven, so its inclusion as a large village in terms of key criteria is again at best marginal.

In such circumstances, a qualitative assessment is supposed to be used. The characteristics of larger villages are given in SHA as:

*5.12 To some extent the provision of facilities in each settlement reflects the size of the population, but typically each settlement contains a primary school, with the exception of Pitstone (which adjoins Ivinghoe where there is a primary school), Soulbury and Stoke Hammond. Only Wing and Waddesdon have a secondary school. 85% of the*

*larger villages have a grocery store, 69% have a post office, nearly half have a GP, and over half of the settlements have an hourly or more bus service. All settlements have a bus service and some employment, with approximately half of the settlements having at least 20 B-use employment units.*

and those of smaller villages are given as

*5.15 On average smaller villages have a population of approximately 500 and have 4 out of the 11 key services for the scoring criteria, most commonly this is a primary school, pub, village hall and recreation facilities. The level of employment is very low for these settlements, with only an average of less than 5 units. Public transport tends to be poor with the majority of settlements having less than an hourly bus service.*

As the Fact Pack for the Great Horwood<sup>10</sup> states

*It can be seen there is little in terms of local provision and local residents will rely on journeys to higher order settlements (i.e. Winslow, Buckingham or Milton Keynes). For example, there is no shop, village post office, bank or cash machine or fresh food outlet. The village does nonetheless support The Crown PH, The Swan Inn, a motor vehicle service station and two other businesses.*

and as in addition the bus service in the village is poor, it is clear that Great Horwood has more of the characteristics of a small village than a large village, and that the qualitative assessment should have recognised this. It is possible that the inclusion of Great Horwood as a large village in the 2007/2009 assessment (erroneously, as argued above) may have coloured the views of those making the 2012 assessment. In any event, the classification of Great Horwood as a large village in 2012 SHA, despite the failure to satisfy the criteria detailed above, is definitely anomalous.

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