Monitoring and Research

Urban Capacity Study

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Huntingdonshire District Council

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This document has been compiled in consultation with local developers, development agents, landowners, the Environment Agency and Cambridgeshire County Council. Comments from any interested parties are welcome both on the methodology used and bringing to the Council’s attention any additional potential development sites in the settlements covered by the study. These will be taken into consideration when the study is reviewed and updated prior to the preparation of the Local Development Document, or whatever document(s) form the development plan at the time.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Study

1.1 Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: *Housing* (March 2000) (PPG3) sets out the expectation that all local planning authorities should undertake an urban capacity study. Its purpose is to inform decisions on the location of new homes to ensure priority is given to reusing previously developed land, constructing new homes in accessible locations and maximising the potential of development land in order to reduce land take for new housing.

1.2 This study seeks to identify urban capacity in Huntingdonshire at the start of 2002 (with minor updates where circumstances are known to have changed), and to assess the potential yield of additional dwellings in the period to 2016. Specific sites with potential for residential development are identified. However, circumstances may change and the inclusion of a site does not imply that it will necessarily be appropriate or available for development at a particular time. The results of the study will be an input to a Local Development Document for Huntingdonshire (replacing the present Local Plan) and will inform discussions between landowners, potential developers and development control staff.

1.3 The study will be updated as preparation of the Local Development Document proceeds. It is intended to complete the first review of the Urban Capacity Study prior to publication of the deposit version of the LDD.

Scope of the Study

1.4 The DETR produced a guidance document *Tapping the Potential* in December 2000. This suggests that in considering the areas in which to search for housing capacity local authorities could assume that ‘urban’ embraces all settlements that can contribute to sustainable patterns of development. Typically these would contain shops and services and be accessible by public transport. Regional Planning Guidance Note 6: *East Anglia* (RPG6) sets the strategic context for the study and implies that allocations for development should be directed to the market towns and in certain specific circumstances to large villages that have a range of facilities and good public transport links to larger centres, particularly within the Cambridge sub-region.

1.5 Consequently, the scope of this study has been restricted to market towns and those larger villages that might meet these criteria\(^1\). The following settlements are included based on their population size, level of services and accessibility to major centres:

- Huntingdon
- St Neots
- St Ives (inc. London Road)
- Ramsey (including Bury)
- Brampton
- Godmanchester
- Farcet
- Fenstanton
- Little Paxton
- Sawtry
- Yaxley

\(^1\) The inclusion of particular settlements within this study should not be taken to imply that they may be suitable for accommodating equal levels of growth, or that they will occupy a particular position within any revision to the settlement hierarchy for the district. These are matters that will be assessed and debated during the preparation of the Local Development Document (or whatever document forms the development plan at that time).
1.6 It is acknowledged that minor developments will continue to take place in other settlements, in accordance with the prevailing development strategy, but their overall contribution to the district's housing capacity is not sufficiently significant as to warrant detailed surveys of capacity. Most such schemes will come forward from previously developed land and intensification of existing residential properties – developments which are highly dependent on individual circumstances and the aspirations of owners.

Sources of Capacity

1.7 The sources of capacity assessed in this study are primarily those listed in *Tapping the Potential*. In recognition of local circumstances the category of 'previously developed vacant or derelict land and buildings' has been extended to include agricultural land and buildings wholly or largely contained within the built up part of a settlement to ensure that land no longer efficiently used, in sustainable locations was not excluded. The following table summarises the potential sources of capacity considered in this study. Full details as specified in *Tapping The Potential* are set out in Appendix 1.

Table 1.1: Sources of Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision of existing housing</td>
<td>Subdivision of existing residential accommodation into two or more separate units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flats over shops</td>
<td>Conversion of the upper floors of retail premises to residential use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty homes</td>
<td>Only properties registered as long term vacant have been identified for potential reintroduction to the housing supply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously developed land and buildings</td>
<td>This includes a large variety of sites such as former industrial land, derelict buildings and vacant plots. Agricultural land and buildings within settlements have been added to reflect local circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification</td>
<td>Development making more efficient use of land within existing built-up areas, for instance large gardens and garage courts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redevelopment of existing housing</td>
<td>Replacement of existing housing with new housing at greater density to that demolished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of car parks</td>
<td>Creation of residential development capacity enabled by different parking management regimes and public transport promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion of commercial buildings</td>
<td>Changes of use from offices or industrial buildings to residential accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing housing allocations/permissions</td>
<td>By applying better design and more sensitive layouts to allocated sites and those with outline permission anticipated yields may be increased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing employment allocations</td>
<td>Commercial land allocations in excess of anticipated requirements may be suitable for housing or mixed use developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant land not previously developed</td>
<td>Within urban areas this is land which has not been in use either for built, agricultural or open space purposes. To address specific issues on the Oxmoor estate in Huntingdon extensive grassed areas originally intended as general amenity open space are included here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 METHODOLOGY

Approach to Assessing Capacity

2.1 *Tapping the Potential* advises that once the potential sources of housing capacity are identified it is necessary to quantify each. Full surveys are recommended, with a number of proxy measures suggested where these are not practical. Once the potential sources of capacity are identified and specific sites known it is necessary to calculate the number of dwellings that can be accommodated. This is termed the 'unconstrained capacity' which is a theoretical calculation of housing potential if all constraints are ignored. After this is established all sources of capacity are re-assessed to try to establish the likely actual yield of new homes within a certain timeframe, known as the 'discounted capacity'. *Tapping the Potential* comments that "proactive planning to unlock capacity, combined with favourable market conditions given impetus by PPG3, should lead to higher proportions of the unconstrained capacity being realised for development than has been the case hitherto". (Page 33)

2.2 For this study the unconstrained capacity for residential development has been identified by a number of methods:
- Direct surveying
- Analysis of development trends over the last 15 years
- Previously developed sites identified through the NLUD\(^2\) survey
- Local agents who were approached to submit details of sites for consideration
- Recent preliminary enquiries from landowners and prospective developers.

2.3 Some sources of capacity, such as flats over shops or sub-division of existing residential properties, pose difficulties in identifying specific opportunities. However, they make an ongoing contribution to the dwelling stock. Thus, *Tapping the Potential* advocates use of proxy measures or yardsticks whereby an anticipated contribution from these sources is calculated from surveys of typical areas and past trends. Consequently the present study has taken a design led approach to the assessment of identified sites, complemented by the use of proxy measures and yardsticks to produce capacity estimates for non-site specific sources.

2.4 Identified sites, predominantly within the broad category of previously developed land or buildings, form the majority of the unconstrained capacity which has been identified. The suitability of each site for residential development was assessed against known constraints such as flooding, surrounding uses, willingness of owners to release them for development and extant planning permissions for alternative uses. Sites considered wholly unsuitable for residential development were discounted at this point. Furthermore, sites of less than 0.2 hectares were discounted from individual assessment and incorporated into the consideration of non-site specific sources of capacity, most commonly intensification. Each site identified is listed in Appendix 2 which details its location, size, unconstrained capacity, design based capacity and reason for discounting, if any.

\(^2\) The National Land Use Database is co-ordinated by central government to record the amount and distribution of previously developed land which may be available for redevelopment.
Following this broad discounting detailed consultations on the remaining sites were carried out with the Environment Agency, Cambridgeshire County Council’s Environment and Transport Department, and Huntingdonshire District Council’s Environment & Transport Division and Environmental Health Division. Chesterton Planning and Economics were engaged to provide advice on the economic feasibility of some of the sites being considered, including the potential economic impact of the change of use of sites from employment to residential use. The comments received highlighted specific constraints with a small number of sites which were then discounted resulting in a final list of sites for which detailed capacity analysis has been conducted. Finally the promoters of these sites were contacted to ascertain their assessment of the potential completion date of development of each site, should permission for housing development be secured.

PPG3 advocates a design-led approach to assessing capacity, advising that urban capacity studies “should consider various options in relation to density of development, levels of parking provision, different residential layouts and the mix of housing types” (para 24). This allows the most realistic assessment to be made of a site’s development potential. In particular it allows exploration of schemes of varying densities to see how higher densities can be accommodated while producing attractive homes in keeping with the character of the surrounding area.

Some sites considered in this study already have plans drawn up for potential development schemes. Where these are considered appropriate they have been included in this study to illustrate the potential capacity of the site. However, a specialist urban design consultancy was used to prepare illustrative schemes for most of the sites. Jon Rowland Urban Design Consultants were appointed and have produced two development scenarios for each site. The ‘basic scenario’ is based on typical current densities and parking standards compliant with the advice in PPG3. The ‘optimum scenario’ is what could be achieved if significant changes were made to densities and parking provision. The results of this work are set out in Section 4 of this report.

The site specific basic scenarios are mostly designed at densities around 10% higher than typically achieved in Huntingdonshire prior to PPG3 whilst the optimum scenarios yield on average 30% more dwellings than the basic scenarios. For consistency, when considering the non-site specific sources, a similar approach has been used: capacity figures calculated for the ‘basic’ approach normally entail a 10% increase over recent trends, reflecting the stronger advocacy of urban dwellings arising from PPG3. This may be realised both through greater numbers of sites gaining planning permission than previously and higher densities within sites. Capacity figures for the ‘optimum’ approach are also calculated to indicate what might be achieved if development were to be strongly focussed on realising higher density urban potential. This is based on the 30% differential between the basic and optimum scenarios for site specific capacity and hence normally reflects a 40% growth over current figures.
3 OUTCOMES

Potential Capacity

3.1 The outcomes of this study comprise two main elements:
   - Capacity calculated from non-site specific sources
   - Capacity based on site specific design assessments.

3.2 These are addressed in the next two sections and the total capacity of the settlements studied is drawn together in the third section. Of the sources of potential capacity identified in Table 1.1 some are harder than others to quantify on a site by site basis. Therefore, it is necessary to calculate an allowance for the yield that can reasonably be expected from them. Yardsticks or estimates informed by past trends have been used to calculate the potential yield from these sources. Sites of over 0.2ha developed in the previous 15 years have been eliminated from the analysis of past trends where appropriate in order to avoid overestimating the future capacity by effectively double counting the contribution of identified sites.

3.3 Yardsticks or estimates based on past trends have been the means of gauging the contribution of the following sources:
   - Sub-division of existing housing
   - Flats over shops
   - Empty homes
   - Intensification
   - Redevelopment of existing housing
   - Development of car parks
   - Conversion of commercial buildings

3.4 All other sources are assessed on a site specific basis, for instance the review of existing housing and employment allocations. As a design based approach has been taken to this part of the study it was considered that the particular source category to which the identified sites could be ascribed was not particularly significant. In addition, some sites could easily be ascribed to more than one category, most commonly where allocations have been made on previously developed land. Thus, all the potential discounted capacity from identified sites is presented together. However, Appendix 2 does note the source category in which each of the discounted identified sites falls. This information has been used to estimate the total capacity of each potential source in Table 3.4. To avoid double counting between sources, sites have only been ascribed to the category of ‘previously developed land and buildings’ where they do not fit into any other source category.

Non-Site Specific Capacity

Sub-Division of Existing Housing

3.5 Tapping the Potential suggests the use of a yardstick based on dwelling size to calculate a potential unconstrained capacity figure for sub-division of existing dwellings in an area. This then needs to be converted to an annual implementation rate. This is done on the basis of past trends for sub-division in the area concerned, allowing for some growth in accordance
with the proactive stance taken in *Tapping the Potential*. The guidance then recommends the application of discount rates of between 25-40% to the unconstrained capacity to produce the discounted capacity figure prior to calculating an annual rate.

3.6 For the purposes of this study large dwellings were defined as those with 7 or more habitable rooms. Landscape Design Associates\(^3\) have conducted a broad brush analysis of the urban form of each of the towns in Huntingdonshire. This reveals a relative paucity of the large 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century properties commonly sub-divided into flats in other areas of high housing demand. There is a similar lack of inter-war dwellings which elsewhere have successfully been sub-divided horizontally. A brief analysis of the housing stock in the settlements studied in the 1971 Census reveals large dwellings comprised just 7% of the total dwelling stock. By 1991 this had grown to 19.1%. Completions during the 1990s were dominated by larger properties, so this percentage is likely to have increased further. Thus, a high proportion of the large dwellings are modern, estate properties where the precedent of sub-division has not been set and the design often is not conducive to sub-division. Furthermore the market is buoyant for the properties in their existing form reducing the incentive to sub-divide them. Thus, the overall nature of Huntingdonshire’s dwelling stock mitigates against any significant contributions arising from sub-divisions of residential properties.

3.7 Using *Tapping the Potential’s* standard discounting rates results in theoretical total discounted potential from this source of between 1883 and 3012 dwellings. However, this theoretical calculation needs to be tempered by consideration of past rates of growth achieved from this source. Growth from sub-divisions of existing dwellings has been very low during the past 15 years with a total completions figure of 87 net gains in all the settlements included in this study. Outstanding permissions total just 6 net gains and lapsed permissions 13 net gains. Such very low levels are indicative of extremely limited interest in sub-dividing residential properties at present. Permissions granted total 106 in 15 years, equating to 7.1 dwellings per year in the settlements studied. No site specific element is identified for this source.

3.8 Theoretically, greater demand for the smaller dwellings which can often be achieved through conversions and changes of use should arise from stronger emphasis on urban renaissance and decreasing average household size. Thus, it may be assumed that smaller, relatively central units of accommodation will become more attractive over time. For the purposes of calculating the potential capacity from this source in accordance with the rate of change presumed in the basic scenarios, estimates may be put forward at an increase of 10% over the rates of growth experienced in the past 15 years. To reflect adoption of the optimum approach a 40% growth over past rates is calculated. This would give a rate of between 7.8 and 9.9 dwellings per year compared to the previous 7.1 in all the settlements, giving totals of between 117 and 149 for the period to 2016. Given the low level of contribution from this potential source of capacity the potential yield is not ascribed to individual settlements.

**Flats Over Shops**

3.9 The potential contribution of this source of capacity has been restricted to properties in the town centres of Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Ramsey where there are significant numbers of retail premises. St Ives and Ramsey already have well established patterns of

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\(^3\) Landscape Design Associates: Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (forthcoming)
“living over the shop”, so each settlement has been assessed separately for this particular source category. No assessment has been made of the potential capacity from flats over shops in the other settlements included within this study as the number of retail premises is relatively small and the upper floors of many are already in residential use by the shop owners. Their additional contribution is not judged likely to be significant.

3.10 Net changes of use to create additional flats over shops during the past 15 years have been extremely limited; resulting in a growth rate from this source of less than 1% extra flats over shops over that period. This is a very clear indicator that this sector of the housing market has either been unattractive or not economically viable. Thus, rather than basing the potential contribution of this source of capacity on past trends a yardstick approach is adopted. This is considered more appropriate as changes in policy, fiscal incentives and promotional schemes all have potential to significantly alter previous achievements.

3.11 Tapping the Potential puts forward a yardstick based on Civic Trust work of a notional capacity of one residential unit for every shop, less the number of existing residential units above shop premises. The balance is taken to be the unconstrained capacity. They then suggest this figure is discounted such that the final capacity is between 25% and 40% of the unconstrained figure. However, it cannot be assumed that this entire yield will come forward within the period to 2016. Therefore, an estimate has to be made of the proportion of the unconstrained capacity which might reasonably be expected to be completed by 2016.

3.12 The figures in Table 3.1 are based on this approach but with two modifications to reflect local circumstances. Firstly, given the need to protect and promote the viability of Huntingdonshire’s town centres the assumption is made in this study that upper floor units which are actively used for retailing or as a separate non-residential use (eg offices) from the ground floor premises will be retained as such rather than converted for residential use. These are shown as units to be retained and are deducted prior to calculation of the unconstrained capacity. The second modification is to put forward rates of 10% and 40% to calculate the discounted capacity, instead of the Civic Trust’s rates of 25% and 40%. This is to promote consistency with the approach taken to all other sources.

Table 3.1: Potential from Flats over Shops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Growth</th>
<th>Huntington</th>
<th>St Ives</th>
<th>St Neots</th>
<th>Ramsey</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of physically suitable units (based on one per shop)</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minus existing residential units</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minus units to be retained</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance = Unconstrained potential</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic scenario – 10% unconstrained potential realised</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimum scenario – 40% unconstrained potential realised</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.13 The total unconstrained capacity for flats over shops is relatively high. Even when discounted to 10% and 40% of the total the remaining discounted capacity figures suggest potential additions to the stock of between 28 and 109 units. However, as the discounted capacity figures are based on a yardstick further consideration is required to assess what proportion of this discounted capacity might reasonably be implemented by 2016. There is considerable scope for proactive measures to influence the rate of implementation. Thus, it is suggested that half the discounted capacity be put forward for completion by 2016. This would equate to 14 additional dwellings on the basic scenario and 55 dwellings on the optimum scenario.

Empty Homes

3.14 Many existing residential properties become empty for short periods due to the normal workings of the housing market. These are not considered as empty properties. National guidance recognises that the inclusion of empty homes in capacity studies can be problematic but recommends that they focus on ‘unnecessary’ vacancies. Long term empty homes are not a significant problem in this area and so will not have the impact on housing capacity that they do in some other parts of the country. The District Council’s Empty Homes Register identifies 50-60 properties which are believed to be genuinely long term empty (more than 5 years); 7 of these are within the settlements studied and might benefit from targeted action to bring them back into use. The Empty Homes Strategy aims to bring 10-15 empty properties back into use each year. Assuming that the proportion of the total in the settlements studied remains constant this would equate to 20-30 properties being brought back into use by 2016. The small amount of discounted capacity expected to be yielded from this source entirely comprises non-site specific calculations as no individual properties are identified.

Intensification

3.15 Sites where intensification is possible most commonly involve development of new housing within the curtilage of existing dwellings or redevelopment of areas such as garage courts. Intensification primarily involves relatively small sites, although larger ones arise occasionally. Theoretically, all potential sites could be identified by conducting an extremely detailed survey of the settlements involved in this study. However, the resource implications for this are enormous and the task was considered impractical given the many other influences on the release of sites for intensification. In particular, the release of possible sites is highly dependent on landowners aspirations, fluctuations in land values and changes in planning policy.

3.16 The unconstrained capacity from intensification could be very large if significant adjustments were to be made to considerations regarding the need for privacy, public and private open space requirements and levels of provision for off-street car parking. Different policy approaches have the potential to make significant differences to the level of capacity, with levels of car parking provision being a very important influence. However, fundamental planning issues such as ensuring privacy and access to daylight cannot be disregarded entirely. Therefore, no attempt has been made to calculate an unconstrained capacity figure. Instead efforts have been focused on analysing recent trends in this type of development. Figures for past trends have been analysed on a map base to ascertain the nature of the individual sites concerned. This was to try to eliminate past sites of equivalent
type to those being incorporated in this study as larger, identified sites. The calculation of
the non-site specific contribution to this source of capacity is based just on the remaining
element.

3.17 It may reasonably be assumed that a larger number of new dwellings will come forward from
this source than in the past due to greater emphasis on development on previously
developed urban sites, the use of higher densities and reduced car parking requirements.
The potential capacity to 2016 in each settlement for the non-site specific contribution to this
source of capacity is shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Potential Capacity from Intensification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements</th>
<th>Huntingdon</th>
<th>St Neots</th>
<th>St Ives</th>
<th>Ramsey</th>
<th>Brampton</th>
<th>Farcet</th>
<th>Fenstanton</th>
<th>Godmanchester</th>
<th>Little Paxton</th>
<th>Sawtry</th>
<th>Yaxley</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permissions granted mid 1986-2001</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual average</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic scenario</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>1332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimum scenario</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>1696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The potential capacity is calculated by multiplying the average annual figure in the past 15 years by
10% and then multiplying by the number of years in the study period. For example, for Huntingdon the
discounted capacity would comprise 8 x 10% growth = 8.8 dwellings per year x 15 years for 2001 –
2016. For the optimum scenario a 40% growth rate is applied.

Redevelopment of Existing Housing

3.18 Very few instances of significant scale redevelopment of existing housing have occurred in
the settlements studied during the past 15 years. One example has been at Park Road in
Sawtry where 20 dwellings were demolished and 40 erected in their place. Two primary
situations exist where such redevelopment schemes may be viable. It is normally necessary
either for the existing housing to be unfit for habitation and thus cleared for environmental
health reasons; or where land values are exceptionally high it can become economically
viable for the demolition and clearance costs to be absorbed within the overall cost of higher
density development and the replacement dwellings still sold at a profit.

3.19 A number of planning permissions have been granted in the settlements studied for
proposals involving redevelopment of existing housing. However, these almost entirely
involve demolition of a single property and replacement with another single dwelling, and
hence no net gain. It is considered unlikely that significant numbers of new dwellings will
come about from this source by 2016, so no allowance is made on a non-site specific basis.
However, site 137, Glenariff, Montagu Road, St Neots has been identified which would
contribute to this category. It is currently in use for sheltered elderly persons accommodation which is under consideration for redevelopment and replacement.

**Development of Car Parks**

3.20 The redevelopment of car parks in and around town centres is raised in *Tapping the Potential* as offering potential for extra housing capacity in conjunction with improvements to traffic management and reducing demand for car travel. The District Council is conducting a separate review of its car parking provision, although the rural nature of much of the district (and related need for car-borne travel for many trips) means that little potential is expected from this source. A specific allowance has not been made for the use of car parks in this study, but any potential contribution which the parking review reveals will be incorporated within an update to the work.

**Changes of Use from Commercial Premises**

3.21 The volume of permissions and level of take-up in this sector during the late 1980s was relatively high, followed by a period of very little activity during 1990-95. Post 1996 there has again been more activity in this sector reflecting a more active housing market and increasing interest in finding urban and brownfield development opportunities. Changes of use have typically involved a few large individual properties. The two most significant examples have been the change of use of the former Anglian Water offices to 83 flats at Diploma House in Huntingdon and the creation of 35 flats at The Old Mill in St Ives. Such properties only rarely become available so prediction of future potential is difficult and a cautious estimate is required of unconstrained capacity. Given the finite supply of suitable premises and the desirability of maintaining employment establishments within towns to ensure accessible work locations it may be inappropriate to strongly promote this particular source of capacity.

3.22 Over the past 15 years a total of 241 units have been granted planning permission, equating to 16 per year. If a basic scenario growth rate of 10% and optimum scenario growth rate of 40% are applied to this then a potential discounted capacity figure of between 264 and 336 additional dwellings could arise from this source in the period to 2016

**Total Non-Site Specific Capacity**

3.23 When all the above sources of capacity are added together they indicate that if a basic scenario of growth is pursued to 2016 the settlements studied could yield a total of 1747 dwellings. If an optimum scenario of growth is followed this would rise to 2266 dwellings. It can reasonably be assumed that the contribution from these sources will take place on an incremental basis throughout the period to 2016, although any sudden changes in the economy or housing market could disrupt the trends.

**Site Specific Capacity**

3.24 Appendix 2 lists all sites identified for individual assessment within the settlements studied. Where the anticipated capacity of a site is known through a planning application or other negotiations this figure is stated. Otherwise, an initial estimate of capacity is made for each site based on a gross density of 35 dwellings per hectare (d/ha) for all sites of less than 5ha
and 30d/ha for sites of over 5ha to allow for additional land for open space provision, schools etc. This initial estimate is to provide baseline information to assist consultations with other agencies concerning the suitability of the sites for development, for example, in terms of potential traffic generation. A total of 85 sites are listed, totalling nearly 124ha of land with an initial estimate of unconstrained capacity of just over 3700 dwellings.

3.25 Once the unconstrained capacity of all identified sites was calculated broad discounting was undertaken as detailed in paragraph 2.4 to eliminate sites where constraints make their development by 2016 unlikely. At this stage the largest site, R.A.F. Upwood, was eliminated following the Local Plan Inspector’s recommendation that the site is in an unsustainable location for major growth. Small sites of less than 0.2 ha were eliminated from more detailed design based assessment and incorporated into the non-site specific capacity figures.

3.26 Detailed consultations as described in paragraph 2.5 were carried out following this initial discounting which resulted in the elimination of a number of other sites from the eventual discounted capacity figure. Of the sites excluded at this stage the most significant was Anglian House, Ambury Road South, Huntingdon where Chesterton Planning and Economics advised that any change of use away from employment should be resisted due to the need for employment uses in the town centre to promote vitality and help sustain other uses particularly the level of retail provision in the town centre. Cambridgeshire Constabulary’s Headquarters playing field at Hinchingbrooke was also discounted from major residential use although it is recognised that it may have limited potential for mixed use development, if site access and other constraints can be overcome. However, the numbers are considered too uncertain at present to include a figure within the capacity estimates produced in this study and so it will be kept under review when this study is updated.

3.27 Following the detailed consultations and discounting a list of 40 sites with potential for development remained. Three of these have since been withdrawn by their owners/agents as they are now considered unlikely to become available for residential development by 2016. Another three sites have been amalgamated. This is a reflection of the ongoing nature of an urban capacity study where sites constantly move in and out of the potential supply as circumstances change. Detailed design scenarios have been prepared for each of the remaining identified sites to obtain a more accurate assessment of their capacity. Summaries of the comments received in the consultation process are included in Section 4 with the individual design scenarios.

3.28 Hence, 35 sites are identified in Appendix 2 as being ‘retained’ and are included in the discounted capacity figure. These cover a total area of around 53 ha. If schemes were implemented in accordance with the basic scenario designs detailed in section 4 these could yield 1918 dwellings altogether. If schemes were implemented in accordance with the optimum scenario designs then a total capacity of 2343 dwellings could be realised. However, it is possible that more detailed investigations into specific sites may reveal constraints which have not been identified in this study. These may affect the suitability for development of some or all of the site, or impose limitations on the capacity which can be realised.

3.29 It is important to stress that not all of the potential capacity on the 35 sites identified may be capable of realisation in the short-medium term. Many identified sites have existing uses
(which the landowner may need or want to retain in situ for a period), many will require some form of site clearance, and many will need detailed designs to be prepared and assessed. Relevant site owners or agents were contacted to gain some idea of when the identified sites might be developed for residential purposes, should planning permission be sought and granted. They were asked to estimate the potential date of completion in relation to three time periods: 2001-2006, 2007-2011 and 2012-2016. The results are set out in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 also indicates the capacity sources to which the potential housing yield from the 35 retained sites can be ascribed. The particular category in which each individual site has been placed can be seen in Appendix 2. In most instances the sites comprise ‘previously developed land and buildings’.

### Table 3.3: Anticipated Phasing of Identified Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic Capacity</td>
<td>Optimum Capacity</td>
<td>Basic Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously developed land and buildings</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redevelopment of existing housing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing housing allocations/permissions</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant land not previously developed</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1161</strong></td>
<td><strong>1470</strong></td>
<td><strong>587</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.31 The table shows a significant proportion of the total being included in the first phase, but to some extent this is inevitable as a principal means of identifying sites has been to draw upon existing allocations, permissions and enquiries. When the study is updated it is likely that more sites will be revealed that might come forward in what are at present the later phases. Past experience of identifying owner’s aspirations and subsequent monitoring suggests that owners can be over-optimistic about the prospects of completing schemes within particular periods, and this should also be borne in mind when considering the results.

### Total Study Area Capacity

3.32 This section draws together all the different sources of capacity described above to summarise the estimated potential for the settlements studied. Table 3.4 adds the non-site specific elements discussed earlier in the study (and now distributed evenly across the three time periods) to the site specific figures from Table 3.3. Similarly, Table 3.4 breaks down the figures by capacity source as well as by time period.
**Table 3.4: Total Discounted Capacity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Scenario</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>2001-2006</th>
<th>2007-2011</th>
<th>2012-2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subdivision of existing housing</strong></td>
<td>117</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flats over shops</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empty homes</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previously developed land and buildings</strong></td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensification</strong></td>
<td>1332</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redevelopment of existing housing</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of car parks</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversion of commercial buildings</strong></td>
<td>264</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing housing allocations/permissions</strong></td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing employment allocations</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vacant land not previously developed</strong></td>
<td>242</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3667</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>1170</td>
<td>753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subdivision of existing housing</strong></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flats over shops</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empty homes</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previously developed land and buildings</strong></td>
<td>1666</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensification</strong></td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redevelopment of existing housing</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development of car parks</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversion of commercial buildings</strong></td>
<td>336</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing housing allocations/permissions</strong></td>
<td>270</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing employment allocations</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vacant land not previously developed</strong></td>
<td>383</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4608</td>
<td>2225</td>
<td>1421</td>
<td>962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.33 Table 3.4 indicates that if the ‘basic’ growth scenario is followed the total urban capacity of the settlements studied up to 2016 could be as much as 3667 dwellings. If the ‘optimum’ growth scenario could be achieved the total rises to 4608 dwellings. The totals are weighted towards the 2001-2006 period for the reason explained in paragraph 3.30.

3.34 As well as the fact that this weighting could be over-optimistic (due to the extent to which the identified site figures rely upon owner’s aspirations), it should be emphasised that not all the potential contained in the totals for 2001-2006 constitutes ‘new’ housing that had not previously been accounted for. As Table 3.4 shows, between 240 and 270 units could be built on sites which are existing residential allocations or permissions within the settlements. In addition, the Local Plan Alteration provides for ‘windfall’ development at a rate of 137 dwellings per year to 2006, much of which will be realised from which the other capacity sources. These factors significantly reduce the amount of ‘new’ urban capacity for the period 2001-2006 which in reality is likely to be considerably less than 1,000 dwellings.
4.1 Most of the site designs were produced for the Council by Jon Rowland Urban Design. They are in the form of simple exercises devised to illustrate how an increased number of dwellings could be accommodated within existing urban areas, thus reducing the need to develop greenfield sites.

4.2 The design exercises do not necessarily represent current District Council views on what would obtain planning permission. The exercises challenge some approaches to matters such as density, development intensity, parking ratios, privacy, height, open space provision and so on. It should be stressed that these exercises are not designs for the sites, but reflect a series of explorations of the development opportunities of each site. Each exercise took between half a day to three days design input. This included:

- A very broad urban design analysis to provide some context for the design
- A ‘basic scenario’ that examined the implications of new government guidelines on compactness and density
- An ‘optimum scenario’ that investigated the opportunities to improve on government guidelines and maximise densities.

4.3 Simple drawings express the broad constraints and opportunities present at each site. The basic and optimum scenarios represent possible patterns of development using a series of basic templates for houses and flats. These have been selected to take into account the character and density of the surrounding area. However, although some consideration has been paid to site specific constraints such as highway issues the scenarios do not necessarily reflect a real site layout, which would be much more tailored. This limited exploration of site design based on good urban design principles gives an indication of potential capacity, not necessarily a design of an actual scheme.

4.4 The main planning issues to be addressed in certain instances include:

- **Parking** – the need for a more flexible approach to car parking provision and how vehicle movements and parking are accommodated.
- **Open space** – the promotion of open space may need to be more flexible, and viewed in terms of neighbourhood provision, rather than site by site.
- **Privacy** – a compact layout with higher densities may lead to smaller garden space and a greater emphasis on neighbourliness. Performance specifications and locational criteria may be required to ensure acceptable levels of residential amenity.
- **Street Design** – a move away from current highway design towards a ‘home zone’ approach could lead to minor increases in residential land. It is also likely to increase the sense of neighbourliness, safety and environmental quality.
- **Sustainability** – some of the design exercises indicate the impact of an emphasis upon conserving natural resources through solar orientation, sustainable drainage and so on. However, in some locations the desire for a more resource efficient layout needs to be balanced with aspects such as local distinctiveness.
- **Urban Design Frameworks** – may be needed where several sites fall within a small area, for example, Ooxmoor and west of Huntingdon town centre. The inter-relationships and roles of these sites need to be considered together so that an integrated framework for development can be established.
4.5 The rest of this section incorporates all the individual site analyses and scenarios, mostly as prepared by Jon Rowland Urban Design. However, a few of the sites already had designs prepared at a sufficiently advanced stage, for instance in conjunction with planning applications, to obviate the need to have further assessments carried out. Some, for example, have detailed schemes on which considerable negotiation has already taken place; others are part of wider town centre vision strategies. Thus, where relevant these details have been incorporated.

4.6 Each site is presented in a similar format.

- Firstly a data sheet specifying:
  - Basic details about the site including location, area, current or last use and ownership and the land owner’s estimate of the potential development completion date
  - Transport issues raised by consultations with Cambridgeshire County Council Environment and Transport department and Huntingdonshire District Council Highways section including access issues, whether a transport assessment is likely to be needed and whether contributions are likely to be sought towards implementation of the Market Town Transport Strategies being prepared.
  - Environmental issues raised by consultations with firstly, Huntingdonshire District Council’s Environmental Health Division including constraints arising from local air and noise pollution sources and an indication of possible land contamination issues resulting from previous uses of the site. Secondly, the Environment Agency’s flood risk classification zone is given where 1 indicates little or no risk, 2 indicates low to medium risk and 3 indicates high risk, this is followed by the appropriate planning response to it.
  - Potential capacity based on the basic and optimum design scenarios produced by Jon Rowland Urban Design or other sources where used.

- The second element contains a site description and key issues for the site with brief descriptions of the basic and optimum scenarios prepared. This is accompanied by a site analysis drawing noting key opportunities and constraints for development of the site.

- The final element comprises two drawings – option 1 showing the basic scenario prepared for the site and option 2 showing the optimum scenario.

4.7 A few sites, not prepared by Jon Rowland, do not follow this format exactly in terms of site analysis and design scenarios but reflect the most up to date information or site designs available.