



Spatial Strategy

for the Village of

Markyate

June 2009

1.0 Spatial Strategy for Markyate

1.1 Characteristics

1.2 Siting & size

Markyate is a large village situated on the northeastern fringes of the Borough with a population of 2,749. It lies 35 miles north west of London and central Luton and Dunstable are both approximately 5 miles away, as is Redbourn and Harpenden. The small village of Flamstead is located a short distance to the southeast. Given its location it enjoys a strong relationship with these settlements with many people travelling to here for work, shopping and leisure via the M1 or A5. Given its location Markyate is very isolated relative to other settlements in the Borough.

1.3 Landscape character

The Open Space Study¹, the Landscape Character Assessment for Dacorum² (LCA) and the Urban Nature Conservation Study for Markyate (UNC)³, as well as Policy 116 of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan (1991-2011), highlight the most important features of the open space, landscape character and wildlife resources in Markyate.

1.4 Markyate lies at the convergence of two well-defined valleys at the head of the River Ver, on the dip slope of the chalk. To the northwest there are two dry valleys which lead towards the scarp slope of the chalk at Whipsnade and Dunstable Downs. The surrounding countryside area is predominately mixed arable use with scattered pockets of pasture, some common land and woodland, and parkland. The countryside around Markyate is designated as Green Belt, Rural Area or Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Markyatecell is recognised as a park with special historic interest.

1.5 There are three designated areas of open land within the village: by the village hall on the northern edge; a continuation of Cheverell's Green, which is a thin strip along Pickford Road in front of residential properties; and Peggy's Field at the back of George Street on the southern edge. All other areas of open land are outside the immediate settlement. There are footpaths linking the village and open countryside and Hertfordshire Way runs through it. The Urban Nature Conservation Study and the Open Space Study both recognise that there is a significant deficiency in open space with an ecological interest. There are a number of wildlife corridors in and around the village. The principal ones being found along the river valley of the Ver (although this has been considerably degraded in places and as a result is poorly defined), the line of continuous habitats along Cheverell's Green and the corridor that leads away to the north-east through Markyate Cell.

¹ Open Space Study, 2008 – provides a quantitative and qualitative audit of the supply of open space in the Borough of Dacorum.

² Landscape Character Assessment for Dacorum, Supplementary Planning Guidance (The Landscape Partnership Ltd, 2004) - is an evaluation of the landscape and policy guidelines for the Dacorum Borough Local Plan 1991-2011.

³ Urban Nature Conservation Study for Markyate, 2006 – considers the wildlife resources within the six major settlements in the Borough of Dacorum.

1.6 Built character

Markyate is a historic village that evolved from a stagecoach stop along the route between London and the Midlands. The main road through Markyate experienced a high level of coach traffic during the 19th Century and many businesses along the High Street developed to cater for this traffic. These included inns, shops, blacksmiths and wheelwrights. Markyate's role changed when the A5 (one of the first bypasses) was built. Nevertheless, the High Street retains much of its distinctive 19th century form and is designated as a conservation area. In addition Markyate retains an active employment area in the Hicks Road Industrial Estate. Markyate has developed linearly along the High Street and the northern side of Pickford Road. The residential areas are characterised by two storey semi-detached away from the historic core of the village. The Urban Design Assessment for Markyate⁴ (2006) subdivides the village into three character zones: village centre zone, inner zone and semi-rural zone.

Table 1: Summary of Key Principles of Urban Design Zones

Urban Zone	Design	Area of village	Key Principles
Village Zone	Centre	Running along the High Street from the North of the village to the junction of Pickford Road.	Protect its historic character and maintain a mix of uses that encourage activity, and promote accessibility.
Inner Zone		Surrounds the village centre and extends south along London.	Provide quality low-rise, medium to high density housing with strong links to the village centre.
Semi-rural Zone		Dominates the western side of the village bounded by Pickford Road up to the school in the north and Cowper Rise.	Provide quality low-rise medium density housing, which accentuates street appearance.

1.7 Key views

There are key views across the River Ver valley, down Pickford Road and along the High Street. There are also a number of strong views from the western and northern sides of the settlement out into the countryside.

1.8 There is a strong boundary to the settlement which is formed by the A5. To a lesser extent is that created by Pickford Road. The junction of the High Street and Pickford Road forms a strong gateway into the centre of the village.

⁴ The Urban Design Assessment for Markyate (Urban Practitioners, 2006) provides baseline evidence, settlement principles and urban design guidelines for markayte.

Figure 1.1 - Markyate Context Map



1.9 Leisure & sports facilities

The village has a number of leisure facilities such as the allotments, football club and cricket club. However, the village is deficient of 2.5 hectares of leisure space. Participation levels are also low compared to the rest of the Borough. Access to leisure centres is poor. It is likely that residents use facilities in Luton and Dunstable rather than those provided in the borough given Markyate's proximity to these towns.

1.10 Although there is a relatively low level of public open space in the village, its rural setting does allow access to the Chilterns countryside for informal leisure.

1.11 Local business

Historically the High Street provided a variety of shops and services for the coach traffic passing through the village towards London or the Midlands. The image of Markyate during the 18th Century is of a bustling and vibrant community with a large number of inns and shops providing accommodation and goods and people passing through the village. Once the bypass was constructed the level of traffic reduced and many of the businesses that were traditionally focused at the passing travellers, declined. The shops and services along the High Street have continued to decline throughout the 20th Century. Greater choice and cheaper goods in the nearby settlements of Luton and Dunstable and even Redbourn and St Albans have stimulated this decline. As a result many of the original shops and inns have been turned into residential properties.

1.12 Markyate is unique in that it is the only settlement of comparable size in the borough to have its own employment area i.e. the Hicks Road industrial estate. The site is of average quality and has good strategic access to the A5 and M1. It is a relatively high density area comprising of a number of dated industrial buildings and provides a good source of local employment given the settlements relative isolation. The site is rather neglected and the owners are seeking redevelopment for alternative uses. There is potential conflict with neighbouring uses as housing and the village centre surround the site. Nonetheless, the area is important to the local economy and will continue to meet a need for employment space into the future.

1.13 Social & Community

Markyate does not have a huge amount of social and community facilities given its size. The village does have a primary school, doctor's surgery, fire station and a village hall. These facilities are very important to sustaining village life given its isolated location. The primary school although running close to capacity at the moment is likely to have capacity in the future. The surgery and community centre are both in need of improvement. Of particular concern is the small size of the existing surgery.

2.0 The vision for Markyate

Vision

Markyate will remain a cohesive large village. The long term strategy to 2031 will concentrate on increasing the vibrancy of the village by improving the range of services and facilities that are provided, whilst protecting its historic character and setting. The emphasis will be on increasing the number and range of shops and services and improving health care in the village. New housing development will be used to secure improvements. Tackling congestion in the High Street will be a priority, and improved passenger transport links to Luton and Dunstable will be supported. Sufficient provision of employment opportunities will exist in Markyate reflecting the needs of the village and the wider business community. Existing wildlife and biodiversity resources will be protected.

Question 1 (Markyate)

Do you agree with the vision for Markyate?

Yes/No

If not, what should be different? (Please see questionnaire)

3.0 The Issues and Opportunities

3.1 The East of England Plan (EoEP) sets out key strategies for development that need to be addressed by the spatial strategy for Markyate. The Plan gives limited guidance for the approach to development in large villages. Consideration must be given to the potential of the village to accommodate an appropriate scale of development in relation to local housing and employment needs. Development should be sympathetic to local character and provide an appropriate level of affordable housing. Public transport, cycling and walking should be promoted in order to improve accessibility to services. The natural, historic and built environment should be conserved and enhanced and important aspects of the countryside and the environment should be protected.

3.2 The character, nature and location of the village limit the options for development, and therefore only a level of housing growth that maintains the current population or accommodates natural change are considered appropriate⁵. Both scenarios would provide some opportunities for the provision of local affordable housing and the consolidation of employment uses at Hicks Road.

⁵ Population: Background Note for the Core Strategy – this gives information on population assumptions and calculations used in the Core Strategy

3.3 Although Markyate faces a number of challenges, there are also opportunities for improvements. These have been identified through engaging with the community, previous consultations and a variety of technical studies. The main issues are listed below:

Key Issues

- Need to reduce 'leakage' out of the village by providing more shops, services and facilities in the village.
- Reducing congestion and dependence on car use.
- The capacity at Markyate Primary School.
- More affordable and a greater type of housing.
- Improving passenger transport to Luton and Dunstable.
- Retaining and protecting the village, its community, its historic character and its setting within the wider countryside.
- Providing adequate employment opportunities that meet the needs of the village and business community.

Question 2 (Markyate)

Are there any additional key issues we should be considering?

Yes/No

Please list. (Please see questionnaire)

3.4 Additional housing is key to maintaining a vibrant village; it helps attract different people into the village and accommodate the existing population in the context of the projected falling household size. Additional housing also provides an opportunity to address some of the issues identified above such as the delivery of key services, facilities and open space. An important consideration is the capacity of the existing infrastructure in the village, particularly capacity at the primary school, which we are taking account of. We are currently engaging with the County Council to establish the nature of the implications for the school, if any.

3.5 Our view is that a minimum of 112 dwellings would maintain the current level of population and a maximum of 226 dwellings would be sufficient to accommodate natural growth. Either level is a tenable option but would have implications on the level of additional services and facilities that could be delivered. So far 142 dwellings have either been completed (2006-2008) or have been identified by the housing studies. This includes an assumption of 40 dwellings as part of the employment land at Hicks Road.

3.6 There are a number of factors determining the preferred level of development in Markyate:

- the future of the land at Hicks Road (including a number of vacant properties).
- locational constraints due to the AONB;

- there are some clear countryside boundaries which we recommend should not be broken; and
- planning for the accommodation of pupils at the primary school.

3.7 Markyate is a large village in the Borough and large scale development beyond the level of natural growth would affect its character and the integrity of the Green Belt. We have therefore ruled out major expansion of the village incorporating 450 new dwellings (which would provide a 1.5 form entry school) because of the impact that this would have on the character and setting of the village.

3.8 The future of Hicks Road is fundamental to determining the level of growth to be provided in the village. There is scope to provide up to half of new housing by redevelopment at the Hicks Road Industrial Estate. Concentrating new development within the settlement boundary by making the most of vacant and redundant buildings was seen as the preferred way of accommodating new growth by the Parish Council Plan Questionnaire and during our consultation exercises. However, bringing forward Hicks Road would require us to look carefully at the future of employment land in the village. We could consolidate employment land within the site or we could relocate employment uses to a smaller site on the outskirts of the village on a green field site.

4.0 Development Options

4.1. Our view is that Hicks Road should be allowed to come forward for redevelopment and provide a significant share of the village's housing need. The options for the site and the implications for the future of employment land and additional facilities and services in the village are discussed below in more detail.

Development Options	Pros	Cons
<p>Option 1 (Hicks Road) circa. 40 – 60 dwellings, consolidated employment uses, shops and doctor's surgery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brownfield site within central location to the village. • Opportunities to provide some new shops and facilities but overall viability may be questioned. • Deculverting the River Ver. • Improve appearance of area. • Smaller level of housing growth likely to mean overall population of Markyate does not increase remarkably. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly connected to public transport. • Employment area may still sit uncomfortably within surrounding uses. • Within flood zone 3a. • Close proximity to A5. • Area suffers from congestion.

<p>Option 2 (Hicks Road) circa. 100 dwellings and shops and services. Would involve the relocation of employment uses to southern edge of the village.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger level of housing would mean population would continue to grow naturally. • Opportunities to provide additional facilities and services and scheme likely to be more viable. • Relocation of employment area to the southern end of the village would separate conflicting residential and employment uses. • Noise and operations associated with industrial processes (traffic, less attractive buildings) would be removed from the centre of the village. • Opportunities to enhance appearance of area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would require small site in the Green Belt to be released for employment uses. • Part of both sites affected by flood zone 3a. • Significant increase in dwellings within the settlement likely to put pressure on infrastructure. • Capacity issues at the primary school.
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Question 3 (Markyate)

Do you support the principle of Hicks Road coming forward for redevelopment to accommodate the majority of the village's future needs?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

4.2 These issues are shown below in Figure 1.2, Markyate Vision Diagram.

Figure 4.1 - Markyate Vision Diagram



Question 4(a) (Markyate)

Do you prefer development Option 1?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

Question 4(b) (Markyate)

Do you prefer development Option 2?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

5.0 Spatial strategy themes

The spatial strategy for Markyate (and the large villages, towns and the countryside in the Borough) is presented around four themes:

- a) looking after the environment;
- b) social and personal welfare;
- c) economic prosperity; and
- d) location and access.

a) Looking after the Environment

(i) Providing small-scale growth presents some challenges but equally provides us with the opportunity to conserve and enhance the environment in and around the village including the gateways and views of the Ver Valley. Crucially, the scale of growth and its location should maintain the character and nature of the village. Consideration should also be given to enhancing and maintaining the character of the existing urban design zones and other landscape features such as Markyatecell Park and Cheverells' tree belt.

(ii) Markyate conservation area covers the High Street, where Hicks Road and Pickford Road meet the High Street and the eastern end of Buckwood Road as it joins the High Street. Views of the listed buildings along the High Street will be protected, as well as the key view across the River Ver Valley down Pickford Road into the village centre. The design of new development will respect and relate well to the conservation area, respecting its history as a commercial street with a variety of uses and with archways leading into rear yards. New development should fit in with the key principles of the Urban Design Assessment, outlined in Table 1.

(iii) A high quality of new building at the junction of Hicks Road and A5 will provide a more attractive gateway to the village. New development should have a strong frontage onto Hicks Road and its uses should be well related to the function of the village centre.

Question 5 (Markyate)

Should a key emphasis of the Spatial Strategy be to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment of Markyate?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

(b) Social & personal welfare

(i) Markyate will deliver some small-scale additional housing based commensurate with the character of the settlement. It will be expected to provide a significant proportion of affordable housing for local people, as well as, support the provision of additional services and facilities.

(iii) The County Council is advising on the capacity of the primary school, and that of local roads. These are both important considerations and will be an important contribution to determining the location and level of growth the village can accommodate.

(iv) Markyate has limited open space within the village and so new development should provide areas that meet the needs children and young people. Securing open space will contribute to enhancing the quality of life for all residents in the village. We intend to retain the Open Land strategy⁶ in the current Local Plan, protecting open land from building and other inappropriate development.

Questions 6 (Markyate)

Do you agree that affordable housing should be provided with future housing developments?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

⁶ Local Plan Policy 116 Open Land in Towns and Large Villages.

Question 7 (Markyate)

Do you think additional provisions such as open space and other services/facilities should be sought for the village with new housing development?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

(c) Economic prosperity

(i) Markyate is distinct in that it has a designated employment site i.e. Hicks Road Industrial Estate. Given Markyate's relative isolation an employment area will provide local employment. We need to make sure that the conditions exist for businesses to invest and for local jobs to be provided to the community. Further work is being undertaken to assess the qualities of Hicks Road as an investment location. In order to compete with other employment areas we may need to think carefully about the type and size of employment land at Hicks Road. We expect future employment needs will require different types of buildings which could be accommodated on a smaller part of the site or an alternative site. This would allow other types of development to come forward at Hicks Road which would support the functioning of the Local Centre.

(ii) Revitalising Markyate as a successful village is at the heart of the Spatial Strategy. To do this we will encourage a range of new services and facilities into the village. This approach is supported in our consultation and from the Parish Questionnaire feedback. We could do this by reviewing our policy on the Local Centre with the possibility of relaxing certain planning restrictions on new uses to encourage investment. Increasing residential development close to the village centre will boost demand for services and facilities.

Question 8 (Markyate)

Do you support our approach to tackling the challenges faced in the village?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

Question 9 (Markyate)

Are there any other ways of improving the economic prosperity of Markyate?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

(d) Location & access

Congestion in Markyate stems from relatively high car ownership and limited parking spaces in the village. Particular bottlenecks include the High Street and the junction of Buckwood Road and the High Street will remain. Car ownership is balanced against a passenger transport service that is unreliable and poorly integrated to those provided within the larger towns of Luton and Dunstable. Many people subsequently rely heavily on their cars to get to places of work, leisure and shopping elsewhere. Our aim is to reduce the impact of these bottlenecks by:

- (1) By providing a range of services and facilities within the settlement, to reduce the amount of people needing to travel out of the settlement.
- (2) Encouraging better public transport connections to Markyate and Luton/Dunstable; and
- (3) Providing a better car park close to the village centre to reduce pressure for spaces along the High Street.

Questions 10 (Markyate)

Do you support our approach to improving the parking and congestion issue in Markyate?

Yes/No

If no, what alternative would you suggest? (Please see questionnaire)

Question 11 (Markyate)

The spatial strategy for Markyate to 2031 is presented in Section 5. Overall, do you support the strategy?

Yes/No

If no, please give your reasons. (Please see questionnaire)

Question 12 (Markyate)

Do you have any other concerns or comments regarding the spatial strategy for Markyate?

Yes/No

Please list. (Please see questionnaire)