

**Basildon Borough Council**

**Initial Settlement Hierarchy Review**

**April 2024**



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this review is to reconsider the assessment and identification of the settlement hierarchy for Basildon Borough, previously set out in the August 2015 Settlement Hierarchy Review.
- 1.2 That study's methodology applied an approach to the classification of settlement types according to measurable factors such as the size of population, the level of facilities and the accessibility of services in the various towns and villages. This method of categorising settlements followed the approach within the former East of England Plan. However its approach to the classification of settlement types is considered to remain as a logical and robust means by which a settlement hierarchy can be determined.
- 1.3 It is considered that there are no grounds for fundamentally or logically changing this approach towards assessing the hierarchy. Furthermore, applying an approach recognised at a larger than local level ensures that any settlement hierarchy arrived at will be consistent with the settlement hierarchies in neighbouring cities, boroughs and districts.
- 1.4 The approach above for establishing a settlement hierarchy has not been formally examined or tested through local plan policies for Basildon borough. 63% of land in Basildon borough lies within the Green Belt, although by its very nature it is considered that the existence of Green Belt has influences the definition, extent and the purpose of the borough's various settlement boundaries.
- 1.5 In order for the Local Plan to reflect the different characters of the different settlements within Basildon Borough, which is a core principle of plan-making and identified by the NPPF, it is necessary for an assessment to be undertaken to understand the different characters of the different settlements and to establish a clear hierarchy of settlements that can inform the plan-making process.
- 1.6 Settlements provide a range of services for their residents and for a wider area. Typically, the bigger the settlement the more services it has and the wider area it will serve. Settlement hierarchies can therefore help decision-makers to understand the role and character of different settlements, integral to any efforts to support, maintain or enhance their character.
- 1.7 Reviews of the settlement hierarchy will be necessary when a new Local Plan is produced because, over time, the number and range of facilities and services within settlements may change, and as a result the position of the settlement in the hierarchy may need to be adjusted, based on an accurate and up-to-date audit of local facilities and services, and their accessibility. This is for the purpose of ensuring that planned development contributes to the achievement of sustainable development, as per the requirements of Section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 1.8 The development of a settlement hierarchy should also follow a process whereby settlements have an opportunity to move within the hierarchy due to planning

policies and land allocations that are made within the Local Plan.

- 1.9 For example, a significant new development next to an “unserved settlement” may bring new services to the settlement such as a school, shops and public transport provision. This settlement might then move up the hierarchy and become a “served settlement” as a consequence of the Local Plan proposals.
- 1.10 However, it is not the role of this assessment to ascertain the capacity for development of each settlement or to provide a quantum of new development that each settlement should accommodate. The overall level of new development directed to individual settlements will be determined through the spatial strategy of the Council’s new Local Plan.
- 1.11 At this point, this review can only address the identification of the Initial Settlement Hierarchy to inform the Local Plan. Critically, until the final growth options and site allocations are known, it cannot set out the final settlement hierarchy as the impacts which future site allocations may have (if any) are unknown at this early stage.

## 2. POLICY CONTEXT

### *National Planning Policy*

- 2.1 Since the previous Settlement Hierarchy review in 2015, the NPPF was updated three times in 2018, 2019 and 2021. A fourth revision followed in December 2023. However, none of these later versions have directly addressed the need to reappraise the settlement hierarchy. Despite this, the NPPF continues to place sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. This stance is fundamentally unchanged from the original NPPF in 2012, as well as the earlier national guidance which predates the publication of that document.
- 2.2 Paragraph 7 of the NPPF is clear that “*The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development, and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner*”.
- 2.3 To achieve sustainable development, Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out three overarching objectives which are inter-dependent, and which need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:
- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
  - **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, and social and cultural well-being; and
  - **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 2.4 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF notes that planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable locations, taking local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area. Furthermore, to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.
- 2.5 Paragraph 78 of the NPPF requires that new housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities in order to promote sustainable development in rural areas. It also advises that planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local

services and acknowledges that where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

- 2.6 These aspects of national policy suggest that indicators of service provision and accessibility should be considered, and the role of different settlements in the borough should be taken into account as part of a future development strategy. NPPF Paragraph 90 also requires local authorities to define a network and hierarchy of town centres in their area, which is considered further in Appendix 1.
- 2.7 Planning Policies are also expected to actively manage patterns of growth in support of transport considerations and objectives. For example, NPPF paragraph 109 is clear that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.
- 2.8 National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which is updated regularly, emphasizes that every Local Plan must be informed and accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal. This allows the potential environmental, economic and social impacts of the proposals to be systematically taken into account, playing an important part in demonstrating that the Local Plan reflects sustainability objectives and has considered reasonable alternatives. This Settlement Hierarchy analysis is part of the evidence base supporting the policies in the Council's draft Regulation 18 Local Plan which sets out the proposed spatial distribution of new development across the borough.
- 2.9 In order to achieve these principles, it is important to understand the role that different settlements play in the current network of towns and places, and the opportunities that exist to improve or enhance their roles going forward.
- 2.10 This is not to say that development should not be directed towards smaller settlements. Paragraphs 82 and 83 of the NPPF address supporting the prosperity of rural communities, including small settlements such as villages. To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies are expected to identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services.
- 2.11 The NPPF also expects planning policies and decisions to take a sustainable approach to new development to support a prosperous rural economy. This should promote the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. For growth in rural locations, policies and decisions should recognize that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport.
- 2.12 In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport).

- 2.13 A robust settlement hierarchy can therefore be used to promote a sustainable pattern of development by encouraging close links between housing, jobs and services, which can encourage regeneration of built-up areas, enhance social cohesion, improve health outcomes and support the move towards net-zero carbon targets through reducing the need to travel.

### ***Local Planning Policy***

#### ***Basildon District Local Plan 1998***

- 2.14 The Basildon District Local Plan Saved Policies 2007 is the current development plan for Basildon borough. These policies are however taken from the last adopted plan for the borough, which is the Basildon District Local Plan 1998. The plan sets out a series of policies and allocations for development within Basildon District (now borough) during the period 1991 to 2001.
- 2.15 Within the 1998 Local Plan, Basildon, Billericay and Wickford were referred to as “towns” and identified as the main locations of services. Although Bowers Gifford, Ramsden Bellhouse and Noak Hill Road are mentioned in the Local Plan, no particular settlement classification is given to these areas. The Local Plan does however recognise that there are numerous small settlements and Plotland areas dispersed throughout the Green Belt.

#### ***Revised Publication Local Plan (RPLP) 2018 - WITHDRAWN***

- 2.16 The RPLP was withdrawn from Examination in March 2022 and therefore has no status. However, some of its evidence base documents remain relevant at the current time.
- 2.17 The 2015 Settlement Hierarchy review, (which is periodically referenced in this new Review), was prepared as evidence for the withdrawn Plan, and was used as the basis by which to distribute development around the borough. Its strategic policy approach was to direct a certain number of homes and employment growth towards the main urban area (Basildon), with lower levels of growth for other towns lower in the hierarchy (Billericay and Wickford).



### 3. IDENTIFICATION OF THE INITIAL SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

#### *Historical Context*

- 3.1 The Basildon Borough Historic Environment Characterisations Report 2011 identifies evidence of human occupation in Basildon borough from the late Palaeolithic period (500,000 to 10,000 BC) from the discovery of flint hand-axes. A few scattered find-spots from the Mesolithic period (10,000 to 4,000BC) meanwhile indicated that there were possibly Mesolithic settlements in the Borough around the Nevendon area.
- 3.2 There is some evidence of settlement activity in the Neolithic period (4,000 to 2,200BC). However, it is from the Bronze Age (2,000BC to 700BC) that settlement activity within the Borough became more pronounced. There is evidence of Bronze Age settlements around Billericay and Norsey Wood; to the east of the borough, around Wickford and North Benfleet; and to the south of the borough in Vange.
- 3.3 There is also considerable evidence of Iron Age (700BC to 43AD) activity within the borough, particularly in the vicinity of Norsey Wood and south Billericay, with a possible settlement at Little Burstead and an extensive settlement at Beauchamps Farm in Wickford. During the Roman period (43 to 410AD) the principal settlement in the area appears to have been Billericay, with evidence of scattered farms and villas at Little Burstead, Wickford, Ramsden Bellhouse and Langdon Hills. There is however, little evidence of people continuing to live in the area during the Saxon period (410-1066AD).
- 3.4 The Medieval period (1066-1537AD) laid the settlement foundations for the modern development pattern present within the Borough, through the establishment of local manors, parish churches and parish boundaries. The historic parishes are:
- Mountnessing;
  - Billericay;
  - Great Burstead;
  - Little Burstead;
  - Ramsden Crays;
  - Ramsden Bellhouse;
  - Downham;
  - Wickford;
  - Nevendon;
  - North Benfleet;
  - Pitsea;
  - Vange;
  - Basildon;
  - Lee Chapel;
  - Laindon;
  - Langdon Hills; and
  - Dunton.
- 3.5 During the post medieval period (1598-1900AD) further expansion of Billericay in the form of ribbon development and infilling along medieval streets occurred. It was however during the modern period (1900 to the present day) where the most profound development occurred. The agricultural depression at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a key cause of this growth, as many semi-derelict farms were brought by local entrepreneurs and split into plots for sale. The extension of the Railways into South Essex during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century meant that people seeking to escape London were able to access these plots, and develop small-holdings and holiday chalets. These areas of plots became known as "Plotlands".

- 3.6 These plotland developments were unplanned and occurred in an ad-hoc unregulated manner, mostly in the period between the First and Second World Wars. Most of the plots were developed without access to adequate connections to utilities, drainage, other services, and lacked metaled roads.
- 3.7 In 1946, the Town and Country Planning Act designated a series of New Towns around major cities in England. Basildon New Town was designated in 1949, incorporating the existing settlements of Laindon, Langdon Hills, Pitsea and Vange. The towns and Wickford and Billericay meanwhile expanded significantly in the post war period as standalone settlements. Residential development also took place in Ramsden Bellhouse, Crays Hill, Noak Hill Road and Bowers Gifford.
- 3.8 As a consequence of these patterns of development, the historic parishes of Laindon, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel, Pitsea, and Vange no longer form separate settlements, but are instead neighbourhoods within Basildon Town. Meanwhile, the parish of Nevendon has largely been subsumed within Wickford Town.
- 3.9 Billericay is now considered to include the parish of Great Burstead, along with the newer settlement known as South Green which sits between the two. Great Burstead and South Green are a single parished area which maintain a community identity, however the previous Settlement Hierarchy work concluded that they should be treated as part of Billericay. Further analysis of this point is set out later in this review, but the position remains unchanged.

**Current Approach**

- 3.10 The Basildon Borough Settlement Hierarchy Review August 2015 identified and categorised the settlements as shown in the table below, which forms the starting point for the review. The settlements must be defined and classified appropriately to help inform strategic spatial options for the new local plan, and to provide robust up to date evidence to help inform planning application decisions.

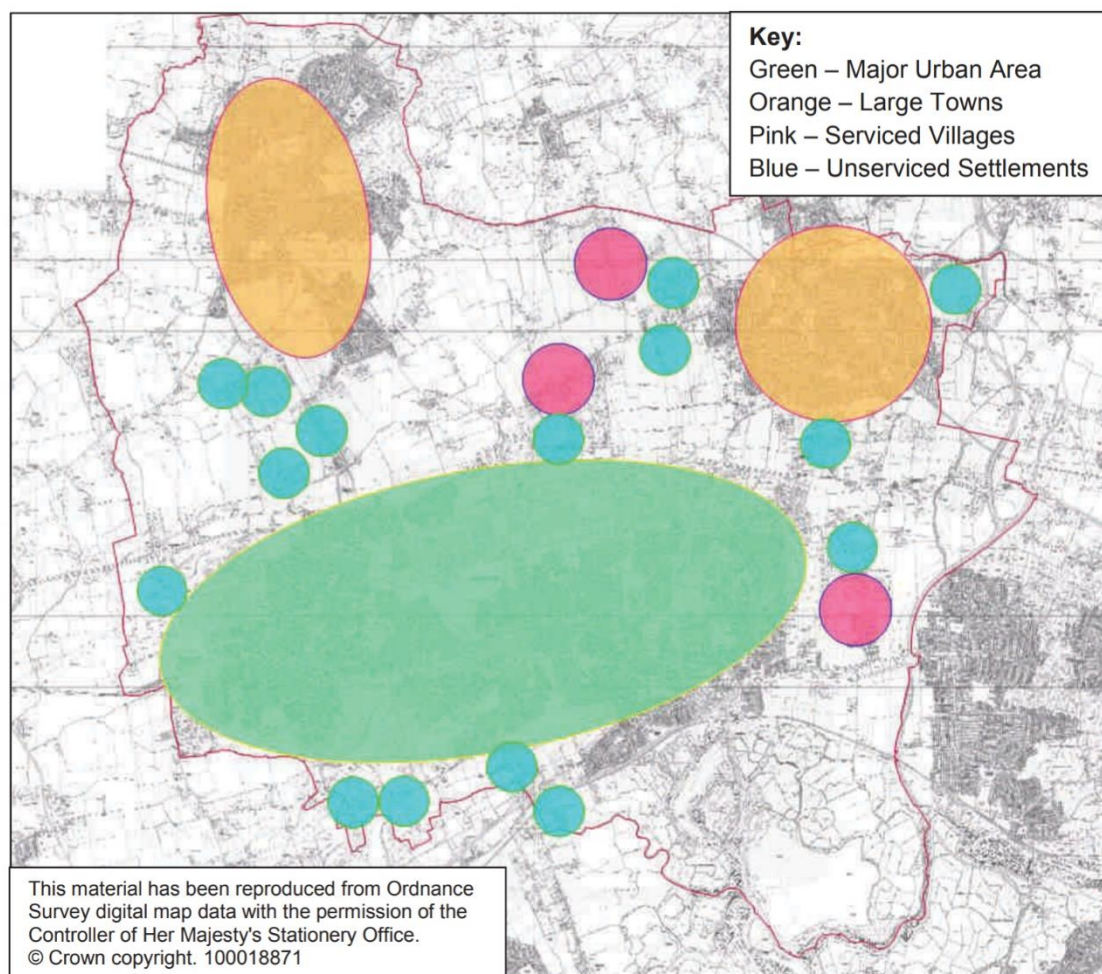
**Table 1: 2015 Settlement Hierarchy Classification**

Settlement Type	Characteristics	Places
Major Urban Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main Town – wider than local role;</li> <li>• Focal point for retail and commercial activities;</li> <li>• A127 employment corridor;</li> <li>• Hospital and other health and civic facilities;</li> <li>• Wide range of community and leisure facilities; and</li> <li>• Wider accessibility by public transport.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basildon (incorporating Laindon and Pitsea)</li> </ul>
Large Towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large town centres;</li> <li>• Retail and commercial activities;</li> <li>• Employment areas;</li> <li>• Health facilities;</li> <li>• Several primary and secondary schools;</li> <li>• Some leisure and community facilities; and</li> <li>• Good public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billericay (incorporating Great Burstead &amp; South Green, and Break Egg Hill)</li> <li>• Wickford (incorporating Shotgate)</li> </ul>

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Serviced Villages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some community facilities; and</li> <li>• Fair public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowers Gifford Village</li> <li>• Crays Hill Village</li> <li>• Ramsden Bellhouse Village</li> </ul>
Un-serviced Settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small collection of dwellings;</li> <li>• Limited public transport accessibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little Burstead Village</li> <li>• Dunton Village</li> <li>• Fobbing Plotland</li> <li>• Bells Hill Road Plotland</li> <li>• Broomshill Chase Plotland</li> <li>• Crays Hill Plotland</li> <li>• Fairmead Plotland</li> <li>• Green Lane Plotland</li> <li>• Newhouse Farm &amp; Castledon Road Plotland</li> <li>• Noak Hill Road</li> <li>• Northlands Plotland</li> <li>• North Benfleet Plotland</li> <li>• Ramdens View Road Plotland</li> <li>• Stormont Way Plotland</li> <li>• Wickford Lawn Plotland</li> </ul>

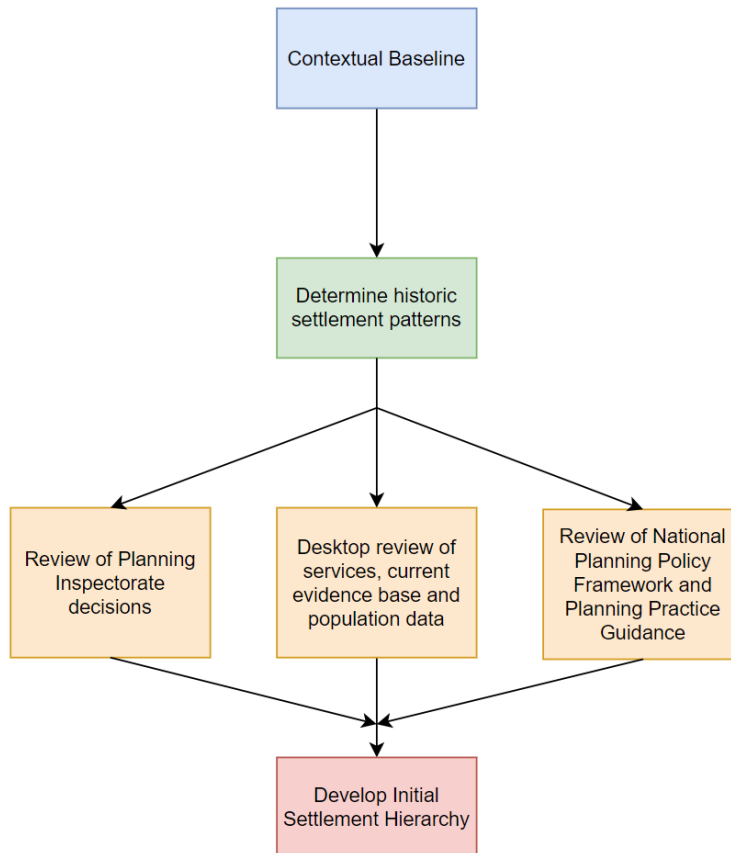
**Figure 1: Map of 2015 Settlement Hierarchy**



3.11 Following a review of other local planning authorities' settlement hierarchy work, the diagram below shows what is considered to be an NPPF compliant, five stage process for identifying a settlement hierarchy. This is consistent with the approach set out in the Council's previous settlement hierarchy work.

3.12 The methodological approach to assessing the settlement hierarchy within this paper has not therefore altered from that in 2015, although additional work has been undertaken to ensure that the assessment is up to date.

**Figure 2: Methodology flowchart**



### **Settlement Services and Facilities Appraisal**

3.13 The 2015 Settlement Hierarchy review identified the following list of facilities or places as being necessary to make communities more sustainable:

- A secondary school;
- A primary school;
- A health facility – for this study, a GP / Health Centre will be used as it can provide the widest service in comparison to an opticians or a dentist, for example;
- Town Centres where a mixture of comparison and convenience shopping and services are available
- Local Centres – where a smaller parade of shops, takeaways and community hall are available;
- A convenience store;
- A post office;
- Local employment opportunities;
- Access to public transport; and
- Mixed housing provision – social, registered providers, private, sheltered, care homes, Gypsy and Traveller sites.

3.14 However, the December 2023 NPPF clearly refers to other features as being of relevance, as shown below. This suggests that amendments to the list of features

and amenities shown in paragraph 3.13 should be considered.

**Table 2a: NPPF Definitions**

NPPF Paragraph	
97	(a) plan positively for the provision and use of <b>shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services</b> to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
101	(a) anticipating and addressing possible malicious threats and natural hazards, especially in locations where large numbers of people are expected to congregate. This includes <b>transport hubs, night-time economy venues, cinemas and theatres, sports stadia and arenas, shopping centres, health and education establishments, places of worship, hotels and restaurants, visitor attractions and commercial centres.</b>
88	(d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as <b>local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.</b>
124	d) promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively (for example <b>converting space above shops, and building on or above service yards, car parks, lock-ups and railway infrastructure</b> )
Annex 2	<p>Main town centre uses: <b>Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).</b></p> <p>Open space: All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.</p> <p>Town Centre: Area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to <b>city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres</b> but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.</p>

3.15 The sections of the NPPF in the above table would justify updating the list within paragraph 3.13 as follows, with the items in bold the new facilities:

**Table 2b: Revisions to the list of amenities**

2015	Proposed 2024 Revision
Secondary school	Education facilities * (includes schools and colleges)
Primary school	<b>Places of worship</b>
Post office	Post office
Town centre	Town centre
Local centre	Local centre
Convenience store provision	Convenience store provision (local shops)
GP Health facility	GP Health facility
Employment opportunities	Employment opportunities
Frequent public transport	Frequent Public Transport
Mixed Housing Provision	Mixed Housing Provision
Public Open Space	Public Open Space
	<b>Sports venues</b>
	<b>Arts, Culture, Tourism facilities</b>
	<b>Public Houses</b>

3.16 Given the references to “education establishments” as a catch-all term in Paragraph 101 of the NPPF, the appraisal table overleaf now refers to Education facilities, which covers all schools and colleges. This is a minor change from the 2015 work, which drew a distinction between primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary colleges.

3.17 The following definitions are used for the new additions:

- **“Public Houses”** now fall within Sui Generis uses under the revisions to the Use Class Order in 2020. Until those revisions, pubs were contained within Use Class A4 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (SI1987/764). The definition is described as “Use as a public house, wine bar or other drinking establishment”. Any premises meeting this definition are likely to require separate licensing consents from the local authority for the sale of alcohol.
- **“Places of worship”** are specially designed buildings, structures or spaces where people congregate to perform acts of devotion, veneration, or religious study. Churches, cathedrals, temples, mosques and synagogues are examples of structures created for worship. These act as a hub for the community. In respect of their use within a settlement hierarchy, it would be expected that the higher a settlement is ranked, the greater the number and range of places of worship which that settlement contains.
- **“Sports venues”** means an arena, coliseum, stadium, or other type of area or facility that is primarily used or is planned for primary use for one or more professional or amateur sport/ athletics events, and for which a fee is charged or is planned to be charged for admission to access the facilities, or sports or athletics events.
- **“Arts, Culture and Tourism facilities”** refers to the definition shown in NPPF Annex 2 under Main Town Centre uses.

3.18 The table below sets out a revised desktop review of services and facilities in the borough's settlements.

**Table 3: Review of Services and Facilities in Settlements**

Place	Sports Venues	Education facilities	Post Office	Places of Worship	Town Centres*	Local Centre **	Convenience Store Provision	GP Health Facility	Employment Opportunities ***	Frequent Public Transport	Mixed Housing Provision	Arts, Culture and Tourism facilities	Public Open Space	Public Houses	TOTAL
Basildon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Billericay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
Wickford	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	13
G.Burstead & South Green		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	11
Crays Hill	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	8
Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		8
Ramsden Bellhouse		✓	✓	✓			✓						✓		5
Little Burstead				✓						✓			✓	✓	4
Broomshill Chase				✓						✓				✓	3
Crooked Brook - Fobbing										✓	✓			✓	3
Crays Hill Plotlands	✓									✓	✓				3
Dunton								✓			✓		✓		3
Noak Hill Road	✓									✓					2
Bells Hill										✓				✓	2
Northlands													✓	✓	2
Break Egg Hill										✓			✓		2
Fairmead											✓				1
Newhouse Farm & Castledon Road														✓	1
Ramsden View Road										✓					1
Stormonts Way													✓		1
Wickford Lawns															0
Green Lane															0

\*Mixture of Comparison and Convenience Shopping and Services

\*\*Where a smaller parade of convenience shops, takeaways or community hall are available

\*\*\* Not within the other service/facilities present

3.19 This appraisal clearly draws a distinction between the higher order settlement areas of Basildon, Billericay, Wickford and Great Burstead and South Green, which benefit from a more diverse range of services and facilities.

3.20 In terms of population numbers, the 2021 Census information shows that Basildon (115,955), Billericay (28,600) and Wickford (27,500) also stand out from all of the other settlements.<sup>1</sup> The fourth largest area by population is Great Burstead and South Green (6,300),<sup>2</sup> but this is not considered to function as a stand-alone settlement for reasons explained later in this section.

<sup>1</sup> [Basildon facts and figures - E07000066 - ONS](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Basildon facts and figures - E07000066 - ONS](#)



## **Plotlands**

- 3.21 There are a significant number of smaller settlements (primarily Plotlands) which have no direct access to services and facilities and rely on neighbouring settlements for many, if not all, of their services. Due to the lack of access to services, these locations were classified as unserviced settlements within the 2015 hierarchy.
- 3.22 The plotlands locations could be potentially sustainable locations for green belt release. Depending on the size and type of development proposals that could be delivered through the new Local Plan, it could be considered that the level of service provision may be able to be improved through some development, which will help to make the plotland areas more sustainable, given their locations on the fringes of the borough's main towns.
- 3.23 The Basildon Borough Plotland Study 2017 identified Broomhills Chase as a plotland area located in a rural part of the borough within Little Burstead. Separate appeal decisions in 2021<sup>3</sup> and 2023<sup>4</sup> considered the matter of whether the relevant applications benefitted from an exemption for infill development in the Green Belt. In their respective conclusions, the Inspectors noted that “ *Burstead, with reference to the Oxford dictionary definition, comprised a group of houses and associated buildings, which is larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, and should therefore be considered as a village for the purposes of the Framework*”, and that “*Little Burstead also includes a pub and church which are features of a traditional village settlement*”. Both Inspectors also concluded that the plotlands at Broomhills Chase form part of Little Burstead, and that Little Burstead is a small village. Access to Broomhills Chase Plotland is via Laindon Common Road, which forms the main spine road of Little Burstead and as such is closely linked to it.
- 3.24 A 2022 appeal decision <sup>5</sup> considered the Newhouse Farm and Castledon Road Plotland area. The Inspector noted that, in the main core of the area, undeveloped plots were few, “*and the predominant character is that of a well-ordered residential suburb*”. The Inspector noted the Council's view that the former plotland settlement area should not be considered a village, that the Council's reasoning was unclear, and that “*The plotland area was not identified as a village in the 1998 District Local Plan, but there is nothing in the NPPF that restricts the policy in question only to settlements that have been formally recognised in that way. The relatively recent origins of the plotland settlement, and its planned nature, may distinguish it to some degree, but these differences do not seem to me to be fundamental. None of these matters seems to me to form a convincing reason as to why the appeal site should not be treated as (lying) within a village.*” The appeal was allowed, and the development classed as infill, therefore benefiting from the Green Belt exemption under Paragraph 149 of the 2021 NPPF.
- 3.25 Such appeal decisions are often considered to set precedents, but there is a lack of services and facilities in this area of the Plotlands. The lack of a discernible, visible

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<sup>3</sup> APP/V1505/W/3249059 Land between The Willows (aka Crystal Cottage) and Cranbourne, Broomhills Chase, Billericay, CM12 9TH

<sup>4</sup> APP/V1505/W/21/3283535 Valkyrie, Broomhills Chase, Billericay, CM12 9TE

<sup>5</sup> APP/V1505/W/21/3278853 Land between 'Green Oak' and 'Woodlands', Branksome Avenue, Wickford, Essex

boundary between London Road and Castledon Road/Sugden Avenue would suggest that the treatment of this area of the Plotlands as part of Wickford for this exercise is appropriate.

***Billericay, Great Burstead and South Green and Break Egg Hill Plotland***

- 3.26 When the Council consulted on its draft Core Strategy<sup>6</sup>, queries were received as to whether Great Burstead and South Green should be considered as a separate settlement to Billericay. This issue was assessed in the 2015 Settlement Hierarchy work which concluded that Great Burstead and South Green should be viewed as part of Billericay.
- 3.27 Under the re-appraisal shown in Table 1, Great Burstead and South Green again scores highly in respect of the services and facilities it contains. For the purpose of establishing an updated Settlement Hierarchy, it is considered appropriate to reappraise the question of whether these settlements should be viewed separately from Billericay.
- 3.28 The first issue to address is whether these two settlements are considered to be separate from one another. It is not possible to distinguish from the map, or indeed from the ground, any distinctive boundary between Great Burstead and South Green, while the settlements are covered by a single Parish Council. It is recognizable on the ground that Great Burstead's historic centre focuses around the Church of St Mary Magdalene and the village pump in the south-west extremity of this area. Around the crux of the village green and Grange Parade at South Green, the residential areas in between are not distinctively of separate building styles. The lack of visible differences were factors in the 2015 review concluding that this area should be treated as a joint area of settlement of Great Burstead and South Green.
- 3.29 Nothing has changed in this respect and the same conclusion is reached.
- 3.30 The second issue to consider, is whether Great Burstead and South Green should form part of Billericay within the initial settlement hierarchy, or whether the area functions as a stand-alone settlement.
- 3.31 Physically, Great Burstead and South Green sit to the southeast of Billericay, and are substantially separated from the majority of the east of Billericay Town by Mill Meadows to the northeast. Mill Meadows is a significant landscape area that benefits from nature conservation designations. It forms a high point in local topography and visually separates Great Burstead and South Green from the main mass of the town to the north. Billericay does however extend further southwards to the west of this ridge, and consequently there is a continuous, albeit narrow ribbon of development along Southend Road that links Billericay with the northern edge of Great Burstead and South Green.
- 3.32 The appraisal table shows that Great Burstead and South Green have many of the features of a stand-alone serviced settlement, similar to those which are seen in Crays Hill, but generally of a higher order. This happens elsewhere in the Borough where services can also be found in Pitsea and Laindon for example, which, despite

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<sup>6</sup> Work eventually ceased on this in favour of preparing a Local Plan, which was eventually withdrawn from Examination in 2022.

having local identities and characteristics of their own, are difficult to distinguish from the wider Basildon Town area, yet for most planning and infrastructure purposes are considered to be smaller parts of the larger Basildon area.

- 3.33 Due to the adjoining location, residents in Great Burstead and South Green also benefit from the facilities at Billericay, including close proximity to secondary school provision, a High Street within a wider range of goods and services, and access to railway services. The same cannot be said for the Crays Hill, Bowers Gifford or Ramsden Bellhouse areas, which are the other stand-alone settlements in terms of service provision and physical separation. This weakens the argument for Great Burstead and South Green to be considered for planning purposes as separate standalone settlements.
- 3.34 Given the physical connection of Great Burstead and South Green with Billericay through development at its northern edge, and due to the shared provisions of services, the previous work considered that Great Burstead and South Green are areas within the larger settlement of Billericay. It is recognised that historically these were separate settlements. However, the passage of time has seen these areas integrated into Billericay, such as Laindon and Pitsea have been integrated into the physical being of Basildon.
- 3.35 For these reasons, Great Burstead and South Green were not identified as a separate settlement for the purposes of the Borough's Settlement Hierarchy in 2015, and this conclusion remains accurate in 2024.
- 3.36 Similarly, the Break Egg Hill Plotland sits on the eastern edge of Billericay, adjacent to the urban area. As such, it is difficult to distinguish this as a separate settlement, while, due to its limited access to services, it relies on Billericay to meet its needs. Consequently, this plotland also forms part of the settlement of Billericay, and should continue to be treated as part of Billericay.

### ***Shotgate***

- 3.37 Similarly, the proximity of Shotgate (population 3,700) to Wickford, and the dependency of the smaller area on the latter for services and facilities means that Shotgate is not considered to function as a separate settlement, and has been included as part of Wickford for the purpose of this exercise. There is pressure for development around the Wickford area in particular, but the Local Plan has not yet progressed to a stage where draft site allocations are proposed.

### ***Noak Bridge***

- 3.38 Noak Bridge and Steeple View are part of the Basildon urban area which extends north of the A127. While Noak Bridge has its own conservation area and therefore a distinct character of its own, both Noak Bridge and Steeple View have low levels of service provision and rely on Basildon for access to services and facilities. The A127 acts as a visual and physical divide to Pipp's Hill and other areas of Basildon south of the dual carriageway. While it could reasonably be considered to affect access to some services given the limited opportunities to cross the A127, this does not affect the area to the extent that Noak Bridge and Steeple View could be considered to form a separate settlement.

### ***Small Villages***

- 3.39 The adopted Basildon District Local Plan identified Bowers Gifford, Crays Hill and Ramsden Bellhouse as “other small settlements”, and the three areas were classified as “Serviced Villages” in the 2015 Settlement Hierarchy work. Compared to the Plotlands and unserviced settlements, the three villages have higher levels of local service provision, although their offer is inferior to that found within higher tier settlements. It is not considered that there is a case to change the classification of these villages. The villages remain partly dependent on larger settlements to access a larger range of services and facilities. These locations are slightly more sustainable for growth than unserviced settlements, as they will have some local infrastructure in place which could support growth subject to capacity. Some further limited development may offer potential opportunities to increase the range of facilities and services in these settlements.

### ***Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet***

- 3.40 Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet were considered separately by the 2015 Settlement Hierarchy. It is not possible to distinguish from maps, or indeed from the ground, a distinctive boundary between Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet. Consequently, the Parish Council for the area covers both. In 2017, Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Parish Council looked to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the two areas. Following the withdrawal of the Council’s previous Local Plan in March 2022, the Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Order which provides a case for treating the village and plotlands as one settlement for the purpose of this exercise.

### ***Distinguishing between the Higher Order Settlements***

- 3.41 Previous Settlement Hierarchy work has identified Basildon as the main town, and Billericay and Wickford as a secondary tier of towns within the Borough. Further back in time, the East of England Plan identified Basildon as a Key Centre of Development and Change (KCDC), which clearly differentiated the town from Billericay and Wickford in terms of the scale of development it was intended to accommodate.
- 3.42 The revocation of the RSS removed the designation of Basildon as a KCDC, and therefore the assumptions applied in the earlier Settlement Hierarchy need to be checked using factual evidence to ensure that they remain appropriate for this review.
- 3.43 While Wickford, Basildon and Billericay produce similarly high scores on the matrix above, there is substantial evidence to note that Basildon functions as the main town within the Borough. Key factors which distinguish it from Billericay and Wickford are:
- A significantly higher population than either of the other two settlements;
  - Its town centre (Basildon) is recognised as a higher order centre within the Council’s Retail and Leisure Needs Study 2024. Billericay and Wickford are identified as secondary centres.
  - Basildon Enterprise Corridor is a significant employment destination for

the wider area (South Essex);

- Basildon is the civic heart of the borough, and the location of most local Government services.
- Significant sport, leisure, and commercial leisure provision is located within Basildon; and
- The largest bus and railway station hub is located within Basildon Town Centre.
- More of the “Arts, Culture and Tourism” facilities are found within Basildon, particularly hotels, art galleries and museums.

3.44 It remains entirely appropriate to consider Basildon to be the main centre within Basildon borough, as it has a wider role in providing services and jobs compared to Billericay and Wickford, where provision is more focused on meeting the needs of the local area. As the 2021 census data shows, Wickford and Billericay’s populations are comparable, while the similar level of services and facilities would suggest it is logical to continue with Wickford and Billericay being ranked together at a secondary level in the hierarchy.

### ***Defining terminology***

3.45 In 2018 the House of Commons library published a research briefing entitled “City and Town Classification of Constituencies and Local Authorities”<sup>7</sup> Its classifications are intended to assist in analysing data and understanding differences, trends and inequalities across Great Britain. Within this model, each constituency and local authority is assigned to one of six categories, e.g. “Core City” or “Small Town” which most closely matches its population distribution.

3.46 This is intended to offer an alternative to older binary rural or urban classifications in analysing variations. It notes that the old “Urban” or “Rural” classifications are, for example, unable to tell a reader about variations between settlements of different sizes, since it classifies both small towns and large cities as, essentially, the same “urban” concept.

3.47 None of the settlements within Basildon Borough meet the definition of core cities or other cities, given that the borough itself has a total population of 187,500 according to the 2021 census.

3.48 Basildon’s population of 115,955 defines it as a large town and is the borough’s largest settlement. Beneath this are the medium size towns, which have a population of 25,000 to 59,999. Billericay and Wickford meet this definition.

3.49 The borough has no small towns, which are defined as a population between 7,500 and 24,999. The category beneath small towns is “villages and small communities”, which contain a population of 7,499 or below.

3.50 Great Burstead and South Green’s population is around 6,300 but as explained above, the area is considered to function as part of Billericay. The population of Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet, together, is around 2,000 people, making it the next largest settlement in the hierarchy.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8322/>

- 3.51 Basildon borough does contain a large number of “villages and small communities” so it is apparent that, for the settlement hierarchy to be robust in this borough, the category needs further break down. With this in mind, it is of relevance to acknowledge the previous settlement hierarchy work which identified that many of the borough’s Plotland areas were deficient in local services and amenities.
- 3.52 It is also noteworthy that the 2015 review contained a third category of “serviced villages” placed above “unserviced settlements” in the hierarchy. This position was originally established by Settlement Hierarchy work undertaken in 2012 by the Council, and was consistent with the former East of England Plan. While this approach is now 12 years old it sought to direct the majority of growth to the largest centres in the first instance. This approach remains relevant today.
- 3.53 As noted in Chapter 2 which provides the policy context, the NPPF does not provide bespoke guidance on how to undertake a settlement hierarchy. However, the NPPF’s expectations for the planning system to deliver sustainable development are clear, while the emphasis on reusing brownfield land, including the anticipation for higher density development in town centres and around main transport hubs provide a clear planning steer that the majority of development should be located within the borough’s main settlement.
- 3.54 As such it is considered that “Serviced Villages”, and “Unserviced Settlements” should be retained as categories in the hierarchy.
- 3.55 The initial settlement hierarchy in 2024 can therefore be established, and is set out in Table 4 below:

**Table 4: Initial Settlement Hierarchy 2024**

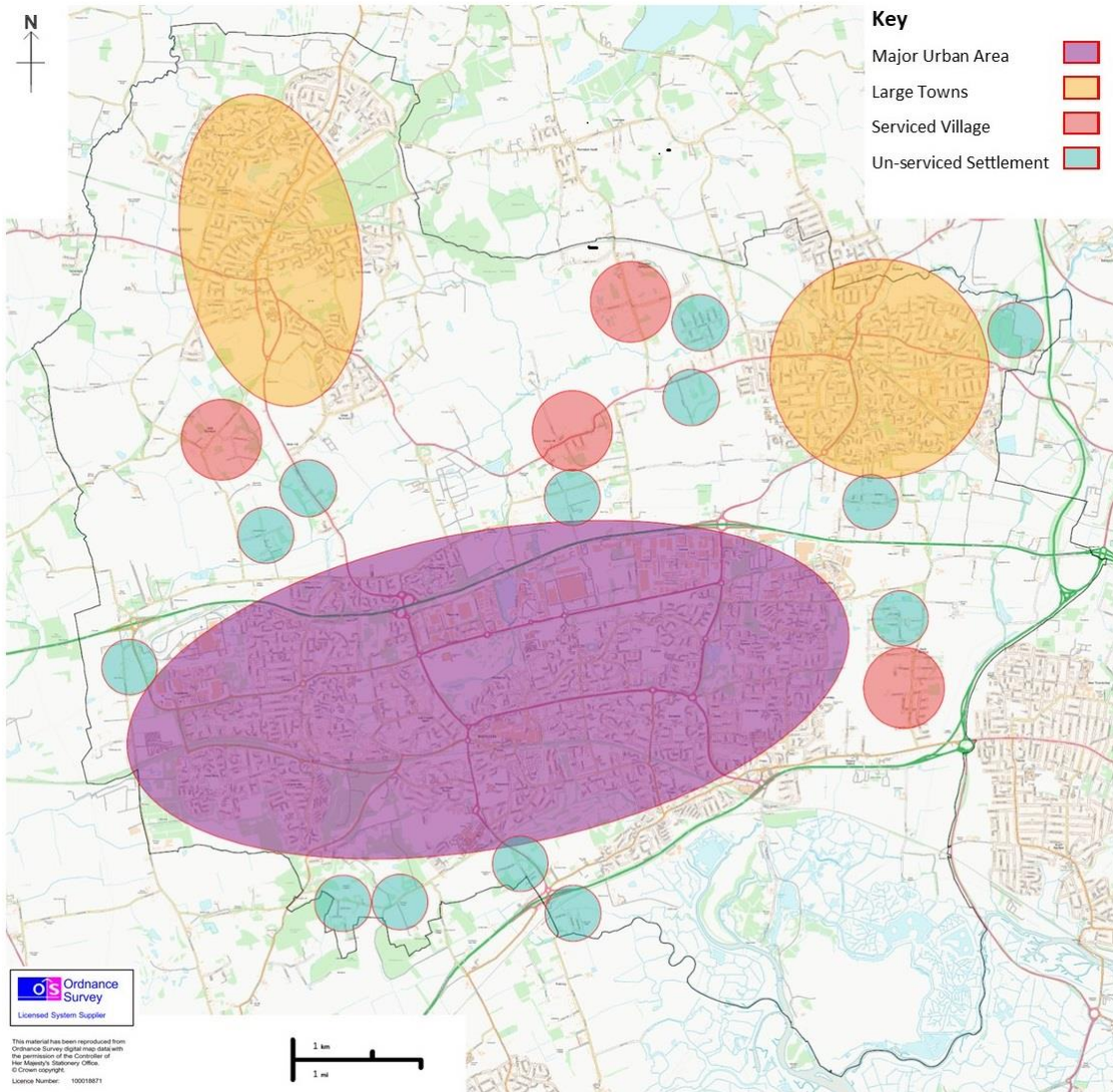
Settlement Type	Typical Characteristics	Places
<p><b>Large Town</b></p> <p>Indicative population 60,000+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main Town – wider than local role;</li> <li>• Focal point for retail and commercial activities.</li> <li>• A127 employment corridor;</li> <li>• Hospital and other health and civic facilities;</li> <li>• Widest range of sports, community and leisure facilities.</li> <li>• Accessibility to the widest range of destinations by public transport</li> <li>• Primary and secondary schools, as well as a tertiary college</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basildon (incorporating Laindon, Noak Bridge and Pitsea)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Medium Towns</b></p> <p>Indicative population 25,000+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large town centres;</li> <li>• Retail and commercial activities;</li> <li>• Employment areas;</li> <li>• Health facilities;</li> <li>• Several primary and secondary schools;</li> <li>• Some leisure and community facilities; and</li> <li>• Good public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Billericay (incorporating Great Burstard &amp; South Green, and Break Egg Hill)</li> <li>• Wickford (incorporating Shotgate, plus</li> </ul>

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		Newhouse Road and Castledon Farm plotland)
<p><b>Serviced Villages</b></p> <p>Indicative population between 500 and 7,499</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some community facilities;</li> <li>• Limited range of local shops and amenities; and</li> <li>• Some public transport accessibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet</li> <li>• Crays Hill Village</li> <li>• Ramsden Bellhouse Village</li> <li>• Little Burstead Village and Broomshill Chase</li> </ul>
<p><b>Unserviced Settlements</b></p> <p>Indicative population in the low hundreds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small collection of dwellings;</li> <li>• Limited public transport accessibility</li> <li>• Very limited, if any, local shops or amenities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunton Village</li> <li>• Crooked Brook/Fobbing Plotland</li> <li>• Bells Hill Road Plotland</li> <li>• Crays Hill Plotland</li> <li>• Fairmead Plotland</li> <li>• Green Lane Plotland</li> <li>• Noak Hill Road</li> <li>• Northlands Plotland</li> <li>• Ramdens View Road Plotland</li> <li>• Stormont Way Plotland</li> <li>• Wickford Lawn Plotland</li> </ul>

3.56 Following this review, a map showing the locations of settlements within the initial 2024 hierarchy is shown in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Initial Settlement Hierarchy 2024**





## 4. INITIAL CONCLUSIONS AND CHANGES TO THE HIERARCHY

- 4.1 This paper has reviewed the settlement hierarchy of Basildon Borough, with the starting point being the work undertaken in 2015. The paper takes account of changes in the patterns of development on the ground and the changes in the national policy context for plan-making since that date.
- 4.2 Basildon remains at the top of the hierarchy, with Billericay and Wickford remaining at a secondary level in the hierarchy.
- 4.3 Consideration was again given as to whether Great Burstead and South Green should be treated as a separate settlement to Billericay. Due to the degree of physical and service integration, it was found that Great Burstead and South Green should be treated as part of Billericay for the purposes of the Settlement Hierarchy, and form a potentially sustainable location for future growth due to the level of service provision available.
- 4.4 Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Parish Council's proposals for a Neighbourhood Development Order is considered to support the case that these two areas should be treated as one settlement for the purposes of updating the settlement hierarchy.
- 4.5 Appeal decisions where Inspectors treated Little Burstead and Broomhill Chase plotland as the same settlement, allowing infill development to benefit from an exemption to national Green Belt policy are considered to provide the basis for Little Burstead and Broomhill Chase to be treated as one settlement.

### *Changes in Classification*

- 4.6 Chapter 3 of this report sets out the settlement hierarchy arising from this review. There are no downward revisions in the hierarchy. However, appeal decisions suggest that some minor changes to the hierarchy are needed. These result in some additions into the third tier "Small Village" category, as follows:
- Little Burstead and Broomhill Chase being treated as one settlement, moving into the "Small Village" category
  - Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet being treated as one settlement, moving into the "Small Village" category
- 4.7 At the Newhouse Farm and Castledon Road plotland area, it is noted that the Inspector considered this to be a village but there are a lack of services and amenities here. The lack of a visible boundary between the area and its location on the fringe of Wickford suggests its treatment as part of second tier Wickford is appropriate.
- 4.8 The emerging Basildon Local Plan has completed the initial Regulation 18 stage issues and options consultation. This does not propose any site allocations or draft policies at this stage. Further work may therefore be necessary to ascertain what impacts (if any) that future site allocations may have on this initial review of the settlement hierarchy.

## Appendix 1 - Defining a Town Centre Hierarchy for Basildon Borough

### Introduction

1. It is important for Local Plans to contain appropriate policies for town centres. They can often be a focus of community identity, while the centres will contain the shops, services, bars, restaurants, leisure, entertainment and other facilities that people wish to access locally, as well as businesses, employment and homes. Town centres are accessible by a wide range of transport modes and provide the greatest opportunity for linked trips.

### National Policy Requirements

2. Within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 90 (a) requires that *“local planning authorities define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability, by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters”*.
3. NPPF Paragraph 90 (e) requires a logical approach to be taken towards site selection in Local Plans, whereby the first preference for main town centre uses is that they take place on sites in the town centre. Only where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available should appropriate edge-of-centre sites be considered, or any out-of-town locations which are connected to the town centre. This policy approach additionally helps to recognise the importance of town centres as locations to access services, and to shop, work and live.
4. NPPF paragraph 109 requires that *‘significant development should also be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health.’*
5. The Borough's five main town centres are:
  - Basildon
  - Billericay
  - Pitsea
  - Wickford
  - Laindon
6. The five main town centres are supported by various smaller local and neighbourhood centres, as well as various non-town centre locations which contribute to the retail offer, including trade outlets that operate from employment areas, retail parks and out-of-centre superstores which provide larger retail units in floorspace terms. These provide useful customer choice in that bulkier goods can be purchased from these locations. It can be challenging to offer this type of provision in town centres due to limited retail floorspace, and such locations do have a role in complimenting the offer provided by town centres.
7. However, national planning policy does not consider that retail parks are suitable locations for town centres given they often have limited accessibility by public transport,

as well as an absence of public and community facilities. Within Annex 2 of the NPPF, the glossary definition of Town Centres states that: *‘existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres’*.

### Defining the Town Centre Hierarchy

8. The Initial Settlement Hierarchy Review (2024) establishes that Basildon is the main settlement in the borough. It explains that Basildon contains the widest range of amenities and services. From this, it can be deduced that Basildon is the main town centre for the borough. The majority of floorspace needs should therefore be focused on the main centre as national policy would envisage. However, all of the Borough's main town centres do play a role as destinations for both convenience and comparison shopping.
9. Within Section 10 of the Council’s Retail and Leisure Needs study (2024)<sup>8</sup>, paragraphs 10.41 to 10.44 further assess the topic of a town centre hierarchy, identifying and assigning town centres to the top two ranking tiers. Basildon town centre is identified in paragraph 10.44<sup>9</sup> as the Borough’s principal urban area and a key hub in Essex, with Billericay, Wickford and Pitsea as a second tier, with a good choice of retail, leisure and service uses that meet the needs of their local catchment population.
10. None of the locations identified as ‘smaller villages’ and ‘unserved settlements’ by the Initial Settlement Hierarchy are acknowledged by the Retail and Leisure Needs Study. However, although not explicitly mentioned in the 2024 Retail and Leisure Needs study, those locations would form a tertiary tier in the retail hierarchy, along with other smaller shopping parades. Their range of facilities is typically extremely limited, particularly when compared to higher tier settlements.
11. Older evidence documents (the Retail and Commercial Leisure Capacity Study 2015, and its 2021 addendum) also assessed the issue of a retail hierarchy for the Borough. This ranked Basildon as the main centre, with Billericay, Wickford, Pitsea and Laindon forming a second group, and a third tier of local centres underneath. The 2024 Retail and Leisure Needs Study concluded that the centres all largely function in line with their current roles in that hierarchy.
12. Therefore, in 2024 the borough’s Town Centre hierarchy can currently be defined as follows:

Classification	Town Centre	Description
Sub-Regional Town Centre	Basildon	Provides the largest range of facilities and services for a wider catchment area.
Town Centres	Billericay, Wickford, Pitsea	Centres serving particular areas within the main settlements. These centres typically have a good choice of retail, leisure and service uses that meet the needs of their local catchment population.

<sup>8</sup> [2024-02-06-Basildon\\_RLNS-Vol\\_1-FINAL.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup> [2024-02-06-Basildon\\_RLNS-Vol\\_1-FINAL.pdf](#)

Local Centres	Locations identified as 'Small Villages' and 'Unserviced Settlements' following the Settlement Hierarchy  All neighbourhood shopping parades	Provision serves the immediate locality only, and these locations largely depend on higher-tier town centres for access to goods and services. Local retail facilities may typically include a convenience store, or a limited range of other small shops such as a post office. Some centres may also benefit from public transport connections.
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13. As redevelopment work at Laindon Town Centre is ongoing, the centre will need to be re-evaluated upon completion of the regeneration work. Following this, it can be scored and placed appropriately in the hierarchy.