

# Greater Norwich Development Partnership

## Matter 7 Main towns, except Wymondham (policy 13)

**Note:** EIP93 sets out the minor changes to the text of JCS1 to address revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

### Aylsham, Diss and Harleston

A Does the JCS provide sound core strategic guidance for the future planning of these towns? Would the proposed levels of growth meet the demographic needs of the individual towns and maintain their comparative competitive positions in relation to nearby towns?

1. The scale of growth proposed is explained in the topic paper on the Settlement Hierarchy (TP7, section 5 commencing on page 20)
2. In relation to Aylsham, the remaining uncertainty concerns the ability to accommodate further wastewater discharges within the terms of the water framework directive. This is acknowledged in the JCS and cannot be resolved without more detailed specific proposals to deal with discharges from particular development proposals
3. Paragraphs 9.12 to 9.30 of EC4 summarise the role of Aylsham town centre for the surrounding area. Generally the picture painted is of a vibrant and successful centre, but one where it is important “that Aylsham continues to enhance its retail and service offer, particularly through encouraging local independent traders and promoting the centre’s markets and its historic environment” (paragraph 9.30)
4. Paragraph 10.2–10.26 summarises the position in Diss. It describes the town as having an attractive vital and viable town centre, with good retailer representation and a vibrant local economy, but highlighting the need to focus on maintaining and improving the comparison offer, and commenting on the mismatch between the supply and demand for space in the centre.
5. Harleston is considered at paragraphs 10.51 – 10.71, with references to the importance of service businesses and the high proportion of small units, and the importance of maintaining and enhancing the comparison retail offer.

6. Section 5 of EC3 summarises the position of the Market Towns, generally painting a picture of locations unlikely to attract large scale employers but where there is potential for a more healthy sustainable economy to help serve the needs of the surrounding areas with the potential growth sectors listed in 5.7. The overall summary at 5.9 does, however, suggest there is potential for such towns to increase their sustainability through a modest share of growth.
7. It can be seen therefore that all are important rural centres offering a range of retail, employment and service functions to the surrounding area which need to be maintained and supported.
8. Policy 13 of the JCS explicitly addresses the above conclusions.
9. The evidence base for H2 (page 3) identifies local submarkets including sub areas based on Diss, Harleston, and Aylsham.
10. The “demographic needs of the individual towns” is taken to mean the numbers of new homes that would be required by 2026 to provide for a declining dwelling occupancy rate alone, when applied to the total populations of these towns in 2008, the base date of the strategy. The following figures are an approximate evaluation of this requirement, based on the only accurate recent dwelling occupancy rates available which are from 1991 and 2001 census information, as supplemented by the latest Norfolk County Council estimates, which are for April 2008.
11. Occupancy rate are not available below the district level. The occupancy rates assumed for Aylsham are based on those for Broadland district, while the assumptions for Diss and Harleston are based on those for South Norfolk district. It is considered that the application of strategy area total average figures could distort the impact of changes on such rural towns.
12. The result of the application of assumed changes in dwelling occupancy on the dwellings required in the main towns between 2008 and 2026 is shown in Table 1. This is based on the impact of a straight line projection from 2008 of the average annual decline in occupancy rates between 1991 and 2008. However this probably represents a worst case new homes requirement assumption to 2026, because the rate of annual occupancy rate decline is likely to be tailing off by then. (The background to these assumptions is shown in Appendix 1).

**Table 1**  
**New dwellings required for assumed occupancy rate for 2008-2026**  
(NB: this assumes worst case occupancy rates at 2026 and thus maximum dwelling requirements in Column 5).

	1	2	3		4		5
	JCS housing provision 2008-2026 (dwellings)	Total pop. est 2008 **	Assumed dwelling occupancy rates (ppd)		Notional resultant total dwellings required (col 2 ÷ col 3)		Assumed dwellings required 2008-2026
			2008	2026	2008	2026	
Aylsham	300	5860	2.29	2.13	2559	2751	+192
Diss/Roydon*	320	9830	2.25	2.11	4369	4659	+290
Diss*	300	7350	2.25	2.11	3267	3483	+216
Harleston	200-300	4150	2.25	2.11	1844	1967	+123

Notes: \*The Diss JCS housing provision of 300 dwellings applies to a town that overlaps the adjacent Roydon parish. However as the available total population estimates relate to separate parishes, a range of assumed maximum dwelling requirements is shown here based on the JCS provisions for Diss/Roydon and Diss alone. However the column 5 figures overall are only very broadly indicative.

\*\* Population estimates from Norfolk County Council

13. The impact of falling dwelling occupancy rates on JCS housing provisions should also be seen in the context of house building rates prior to 2008, and the outstanding housing land commitments at April 2008 (the base date of the strategy). This would also indicate the JCS provisions' ability to continue to provide for growth to maintain the recent comparative competitive positions of these towns.

**Table 2**  
**A comparison of house building rates 2001- 2008 with potential house building rates for 2008 - 2026**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	House completions 2001-2008					
	Total	Average pa	Outstanding total housing commitment 1/4/08 (dwellings).	JCS housing provision	Total columns 3 + 4	Potential average building rate 2008 to 2026 (dwg.pa)
Aylsham	211	30	265	300	565	31
Diss	250	36	237	300	537	30
Harleston	115	16	329	200-300	529-629	29-35

14. The derivation of housing provisions for the main towns as described in TP7 was not an exact science, and while noting the above mentioned uncertainty regarding Aylsham, has been consistent with the evidence studies and consultation responses.

The potential house building rates to 2026 shown by Table 2 (column 6) provide for growth potential above that required to accommodate demographic needs and broadly similar or slightly higher house building rates than those experienced between 2001 and 2008. Such rates should assist the maintenance of the towns' comparative competitive positions.

15. The expansion of Diss is restrained by its location on the County boundary, environmental constraints to the south, east and north, reluctance to merge with Roydon village to the west, a constrained town centre traffic circulation system plus education provision constraints. Harleston is a smaller town with less comprehensive facilities but has a bypass and fewer constraints. At the time of the strategy's preparation, interest had also been expressed in the housing development of potential brownfield sites well located in relation to Harleston's town centre (which have since largely been developed to produce a significantly higher average building rate).
16. Overall, the above three towns are traditional market towns with good ranges of services each serving a rural catchment. They are also the only three main towns outside the NPA, they serve similar functions, form independent housing market areas and are suitable locations for modest employment and retail growth according to the evidence studies. The broadly equivalent scales of proposed housing growth are considered to form a balance that would maintain their existing functions and the need to provide for growth in the area's many smaller rural settlements to enhance their sustainability, retain their attractive local qualities of life, and to provide for additional flexibility in sustainable rural housing provision.

**Table 3 explains the dwelling occupancy rate assumptions used in table 1.**

Derivation of dwelling occupancy rate assumptions used in Table 1

	Dwelling occupancy rates (people per dwelling)					
	1991 census	2001 census	Norfolk County Council estimate 2008	Change 1991-2008		Change total pa x 18 = est total change 2008-2026
				Total	Total pa	
Broadland district	2.44	2.31	2.29	- 0.15	- 0.009	- 0.16
South Norfolk district	2.38	2.29	2.25	- 0.13	- 0.008	- 0.14

- B** If the JCS is unsound in relation to any of these matters, are there any specific changes that would render it sound? [It would be necessary to consider whether these required further consultation or sustainability appraisal.]

1. The GNDP considers that the proposals for the main towns are sound. Proposed minor changes (JCS2 and EIP93) address drafting errors and provide clarity.