

The key issues facing Doddington

1. People like living in Doddington but are worried about over-development & loss of the village's identity.

In the village survey, 93% people said they like living in Doddington. They described the personality of the village as *Friendly, Community, Safe* - a feeling that runs deep in the community & came up time & time again in the Village Conversation¹. This characterisation must be central to the Neighbourhood Plan.

When asked how they would like to describe the village in 15 years' time, villagers said *much the same* (but maybe a little bit more vibrant & prosperous). This is not a NIMBY, no change reaction. Rather, they really value their friendly community, but are concerned they may lose it to over-development:

“The feeling that with increasing development, the village feel will be lost and we will become a suburb of March!!” (Female, 61-70)

“The constant plans to expand our village and transformation. The infrastructure, school & village amenities are not built or designed for this. It must stop before our village is turned into a town.” (Female, 41-50)

Because of that concern, villagers want to limit the number of new houses. 75% said that no more than 100 new houses should be built over the next 15 years, & 91% said no more than 200 new houses². This is not the only determinant of how many houses we should build, but it does say what the village would find acceptable.

Key to the identity of the village is keeping a distinct geography. Two factors are important:

- A clear settlement boundary within which development can take place. Outside the settlement boundary, development can only take place in special circumstances (eg farm buildings).
- A separation from Wimblington, identified in the Character & Landscape report as crucial in maintaining the identity of the village³.

2. People want to build the right type of houses

In addition to the worry of over-development leading to loss of identity, villagers were concerned that the right mixture of house types were built:

“Constant threat of large-scale planning applications” (Female, 41-50)

“The worry of the council agreeing to expanding properties in the village” (Male, 31-40)

“Increased housing, usually 4 or 5 beds which doesn't meet local need” (Male, 41-50)

In the Village Consultation, when asked what sort of houses should be built, the most important were Starter Homes, Family Homes, Bungalows & Affordable Homes⁴.

¹ Village Consultation 3.2

² Village Consultation 5.1

³ Doddington Landscape and Village Character Report 3.4

⁴ Village Consultation 5.1

The fact that Starter homes come above Affordable homes shows a certain Fenland independence – young families want to get a start on the housing ladder, & could afford to do so, but at the moment there are no houses at modest prices that allow them to do so.

Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for Affordable homes. The Housing Needs Survey showed that 52 affordable homes were needed in the village.

There is a gap between what the village needs & what developers want to & are willing to build. An analysis of extant planning applications showed that 44% of the proposed houses were Executive Homes of 5+ beds⁵. There have also been a number of planning applications that have promised affordable homes but have failed to deliver (for example, Bevills Close).

There will be a major plan for the Neighbourhood Plan & its delivery:

1. To identify suitable sites that will deliver the number of affordable homes we need
 2. To encourage developers to offer a range of low-cost housing (including flats & maisonettes) that meet the needs of young families wishing to get on the property ladder..
 3. To ensure that developers plan for more than the minimum number of affordable homes - & deliver on their promises.
3. High house prices are preventing young people from getting on the housing ladder & forcing young families to move away.

House prices are high in Doddington. The median house price paid in y/e April 24 was £285,000, higher than neighbouring villages & Fenland as a whole⁶. Assuming they could raise the 15% deposit, a family on an average household income could get a mortgage for a £220,000 house. There was just one such house for sale in April 2024.

This is forcing young families to look outside the village for places to live. We have 13% fewer people in the 21-40 age group than expected for a village of our size & the number of people of working age is forecast to decline⁷. We need these people because they are the future prosperity of the village.

Analysis of population dynamics shows that the growth of the village population is much more affected by the balance between the people arriving in the village & those leaving than by births & deaths – by a factor of 4. If Doddington becomes an unattractive or unaffordable place to live, then the village will decline.

4. There will be more old people in the village, & more sick & disabled.

By 2041, there will be 48% more 65+ people living in the village, compared to a 2% fall in the other age groups⁸. They will be 34% of the village population.

We have slightly worse health than neighbouring villages, & a higher death rate (neither of these can be explained by our older population)⁹.

⁵ Demographics of Doddington 3.2

⁶ This is price paid, according to the Land Registry. It is 30% less than prices advertised, & in many ways it is the high price advertised that discourages young couples. See Demographics of Doddington 3.3

⁷ Demographics of Doddington 2.2

⁸ Demographics of Doddington 2.2

⁹ Demographics of Doddington 7.1

30% of our population are disabled or have a long-term health condition. The Disability & Equalities Act casts its net fairly wide in this respect, & a more relevant statistic is that 9% have a disability that is sufficiently serious to limit their daily activities.

This has implications for our health services, public transport & housing design, & the Neighbourhood Plan needs to cater for the needs of an increasingly elderly population.

The medical facilities in the village are well-valued¹⁰, especially with the Minor Injuries Unit & Doddington Community Hospital on our doorstep. However, the future of these facilities is not guaranteed – whilst they are efficiently run, they care for fewer patients than other facilities in the NW Anglia NHS Foundation trust, & may become a target for savings if those are demanded.

Closure of the facilities would be a serious blow to the village, especially the elderly. The nearest alternative facilities are 20+ miles away, taking up to 3hrs by Public Transport (6hrs return). There have been proposals to close these facilities in the past, & the village must be prepared should this happen again in the future.

However, there is a positive side, & the facilities could have a promising future. The Government's mandate to reform the NHS includes *"Improving primary care access is essential to support a move to a neighbourhood health service, with more care delivered in local communities"*¹¹. In particular, the presence of Askham House & Doddington Court means there is the opportunity to create a Health Hub specialising in care for the elderly, which would be a significant regional asset.

5. New developments must preserve the character of the village.

When asked in the village survey what they wanted from new developments, top of the list was protection of green spaces, & preservation of the character of the village¹².

"The loss of character of the area following copious backland development – properties seemingly squeezed in with little regard to settlement morphology and character"
(Female 41-50)

Doddington is not a pretty "chocolate box" village - it is a & always has been a working village:

"Still retains a certain Fenland charm. Honest and unpretentious" (Male, 61-70)

Its buildings reflect its long history, & social development from an agricultural to a commuter village. There is therefore a mixture of architecture with different styles sitting comfortably together. We should not seek to preserve a certain style of architecture¹³, but new developments must respect what is there. The Character & Landscape report identifies cases where inappropriate new development jars with its neighbours¹⁴. Gated developments in particular should be discouraged, as contradicting the *Friendly* nature of Doddington.

¹⁰ Village Consultation 5.3

¹¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-to-recovery-the-governments-2025-mandate-to-nhs-england/road-to-recovery-the-governments-2025-mandate-to-nhs-england>

¹² Village Consultation 5.1

¹³ Except in the Village Conservation Area

¹⁴ Doddington Landscape & Village Character report 9.4 & 9.10

In the same vein, new developments should not rely on standard stock designs in modern brick that clashes with Cambridgeshire gault; & there are good examples of modern architecture complementing the old¹⁵.

The Landscape & Character report sets out in detail what new developments must do, for each of the 10 character areas in the village. These must be mandatory for new developments. They do not preclude modern design but make sure that new developments sit comfortably in their area of the village & preserve the village character.

Whilst development is allowed within the settlement boundary, we must take care not to compromise existing green spaces. The Local Green Space Report identifies those green spaces in the village that we wish to preserve.

6. The village infrastructure is stretched.

In the village survey, there was a general concern about the village infrastructure:

“Amount of houses being built & not enough infrastructure to cope with them all - from school to drains to transport links” (Male, 71-80)

“The lorries coming through and the amount of on street parking and parts of the village smell due to the drains!” (Female, 41-50)

“Doddington is one big sewerage problem” (Female, 51-60)

The four main concerns about infrastructure expressed in the village survey were:

- a) Lionel Walden primary school is a good school & highly valued, but is at full capacity,
- b) There are too many incidents of sewers overflowing, with bad smells.
- c) The medical facilities are stretched & there is fear of losing them.
- d) There is a lot of justified concern about traffic in the village.

a) School capacity

A detailed analysis has been done as to the capacity of Lionel Walden school, & the forecast school numbers¹⁶. The school currently has 212 pupils against a capacity of 210, & there are estimated to be 43 children living in the village who cannot get a place at the school. One reason for this is that there are 59 children in the school who live outside the catchment area,

There are two forecasts of school numbers available. The statutory SCAP forecasts are reasonably accurate, but the Catchment Area Forecasts used by Cambridgeshire County Council have been shown to be grossly inaccurate. This is unfortunate, because Cambridgeshire CC use their Catchment Area Forecasts when commenting on planning applications. Planning authorities need to be apprised of this issue.

The Neighbourhood Plan needs to consider whether the school capacity limits the number of houses that should be built, & whether phasing the building of new developments can help this issue. It should also address the issue out-of-catchment area pupils in the school to free places for village children.

¹⁵ Doddington Landscape & Village Character report 2.30

¹⁶ Primary Education in Doddington

b) Water & Sewerage

In the Village Survey 21% of the village reported a problem with water or sewage in the previous year, mainly blockage, overflow, or bad smells¹⁷. If the system were OK, this percentage should have been 0. Anglian Water's annual report quotes figures that are 1/100th of this level¹⁸. Representations have been made by our local councillors over several years, & Anglian Water have promised investment in the Doddington Water Recycling Centre. This has yet to show positive results.

It is important that planning applications have to demonstrate that foul & surface water can be properly dealt with and that it does not further compromise the water infrastructure in the village. Recent planning applications (most notably Bevills Close) have met objections in this area by making minor changes to the hydrology, & it is difficult to assess without expertise whether such changes are acceptable. It will therefore be important to get an independent view on this issue in each (major) application, & the Neighbourhood Plan should propose a mechanism for this.

c) Medical facilities

This issue has been partly covered in section 4. The medical staff at Doddington Medical Centre (run by Fenland Group Practice) were highly regarded. Doddington Hospital & the Minor Injuries Unit were also highly valued, & there was fear of losing these facilities, not least because alternative facilities are miles & hours away, & difficult to get to by public transport.

d) Traffic

In the village survey, 71% people were concerned about traffic in the village, mainly speeding & HGVs¹⁹. Whilst the number of HGVs is roughly average amongst Cambridge villages, there is justification for the concern about speeding traffic.

MVAS cameras confirm that too many drivers broke the speed limit on entering the village – 44% on Wimblington Road & 37% on Primrose Hill. Reduction of this would reduce the risk of accident by 25%.

Accidents are thankfully rare, but in the last 7 years there have been 19 accidents in Doddington²⁰ (this excludes accidents on the busy A141). This is an accident rate of 1.1 RTAs per 1000 persons per year, which is significantly higher than the rate of 0.5 for rural Cambridgeshire.

It is concerning that the MVAS camera on the Wimblington Road measured an average speed of 34mph when positioned in the 40mph area, & an average speed of 29mph when positioned near the Round House, some 200m inside the speed limit. This suggests that speeding was not intended, but that drivers were inattentive – something that would be dangerous with the school & village centre further down the road. Continuing the 30mph limit from Wimblington into Doddington would help to reduce speeding from inattentive motorists - & would be welcomed by Wimblington, too.

Speeds within the village are much lower – 15% speeding recorded by the New Street camera, & 11-18% outside the school. Parked cars form chicanes along Newgate Street, High Street, &

¹⁷ Village Consultation 5.4

¹⁸ Demographics of Doddington 10.2

¹⁹ Village Consultation 4.8

²⁰ Demographics of Doddington 9.6

Wimblington Road (in school pick-up times). These reduce speed but present another road safety issue in potential collisions with pedestrians. A study in support of the pedestrian crossing outside the school showed that the interaction between pedestrians & traffic was at a dangerous level there²¹. That level is likely to be similar outside the shops & chippy on High Street.

Reducing speeds in the centre of the village will reduce the risk of accident, but more importantly, it drastically reduces the chance of a pedestrian being killed should a collision occur. In a collision at 30mph, 45% pedestrians are killed. At 20mph, 5% pedestrians are killed²².

7. Work patterns are changing, and more people will work from home

Most working people in Doddington work outside the village. However, work patterns are changing nationally, & Doddington will follow this trend.

35% of working people in Doddington work from home. This proportion is lower than the national figure of 43% but is probably rising at the national rate of 5%/year²³. 68% work for micro/small businesses, which are more likely to encourage home working. And a number of internet-based businesses have set up in the village (more than in neighbouring villages).

Doddington is an ideal village to work from home. A good friendly community, pleasant surroundings, house prices if higher than other villages at least lower than Cambridge. Doddington can lead Fenland in the transition to the knowledge economy, & this will improve the prosperity of the village.

However, we need to give home workers the facilities they need:

- Good telecommunications – expansion of fibre & improvement of rural broadband
- Office facilities, ideally as part of a coffee shop, something the village would enthusiastically support²⁴.

Several groups/pubs have tried to set up a coffee shop in the past, but they ignored the key requirements of such a business:

- ✓ A coffee shop is not a shop that sells coffee – ambience is key.
- ✓ It needs to cater for its customers – school children early in the morning, school mums at 8:30 & 3, pensioners in the day, & schoolchildren after school & into the evening.

We should await the right premises becoming available & an entrepreneur to take them on.

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²¹ Demographics of Doddington 9.7. The standard measure is PV², which was 63x10⁶ outside the school, with 40-80 considered dangerous.

²² These are internationally-recognised figures – see Demographics of Doddington 9.7

²³ Demographics of Doddington 5.4

²⁴ Village Consultation 4.3.