

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031



Settlement Boundary Methodology

December 2022



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Pre-submission draft of the Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Regulation 14 of Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012



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For any general query relating to the Neighbourhood Plan contact:

Parish Clerk: Karen Peck

Telephone: 01353 741066

Email: clerk@mepalparish.org

Website Contact Form: <https://www.mepalparish.org/contact/#>

For consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan contact:

Email: mnhp@mepalparish.org

<https://www.mepalparish.org/mepal-neighbourhood-plan/>

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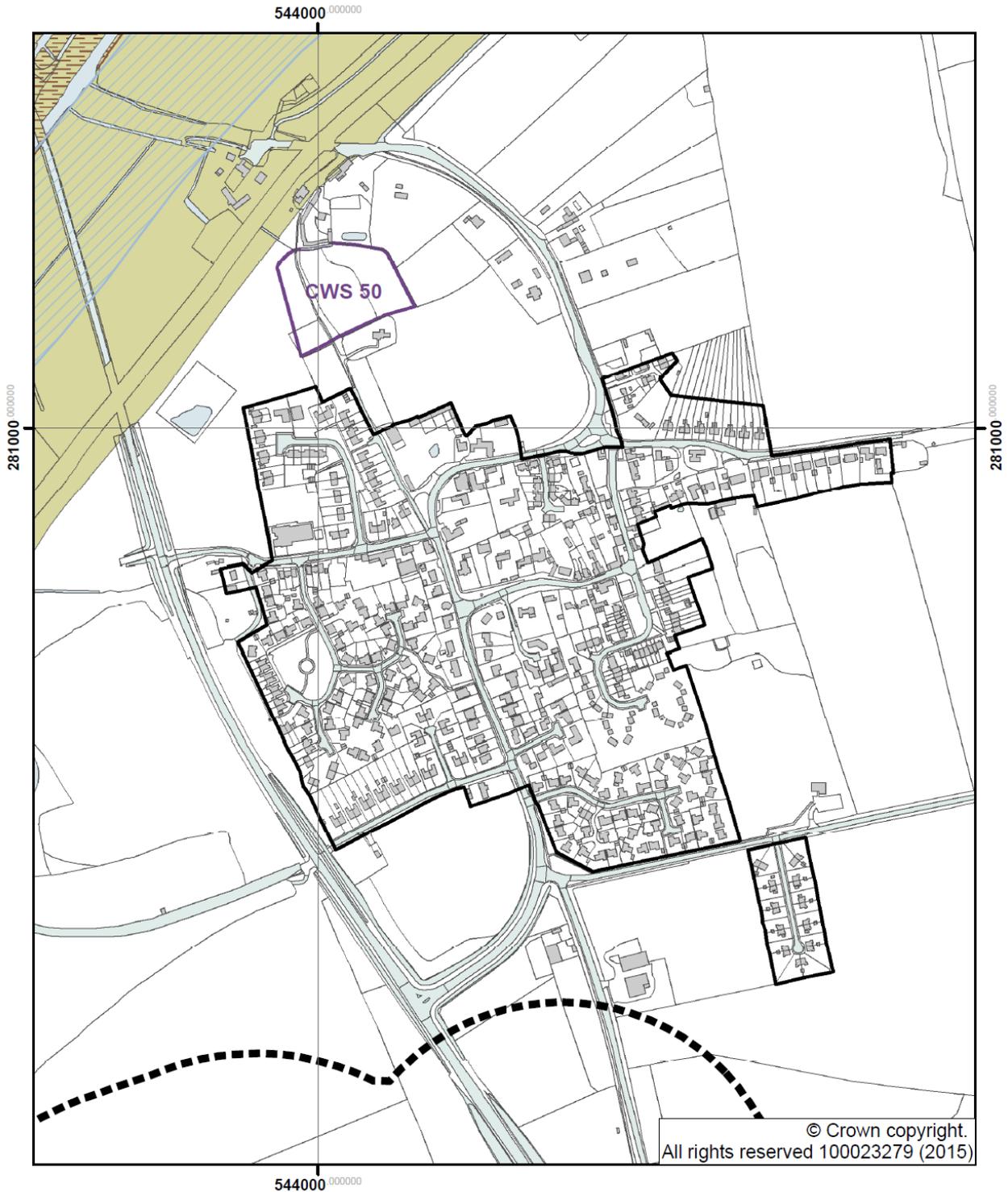
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Introduction

1. The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted in 2015) identified a ‘Development Envelope’ for Mepal.
2. Paragraph 3.3.5 of the Local Plan states: *“The development envelopes are shown on the settlement Inset Maps of the Policies Map. They are similar to those in the Core Strategy (2009), but with two key changes. Firstly, the development envelopes have been re-drawn to include new allocations on the edge of towns and villages and also current employment areas on the edge of settlements - where these form part of the main built-up framework of a settlement. Secondly, a comprehensive review has taken place of detailed boundaries to remove anomalies and update boundaries in light of changes. It should be noted that the development envelopes do not necessarily include all areas of built development. For example, there are numerous single dwellings or small groups of houses in the countryside, plus a number of small hamlets which do not have a development envelope. These are considered to be part of the open countryside, due to their small size and open structure/lack of compact built-form. There are also a number of employment areas and allocations which have been excluded as they are in the open countryside or are divided from the main built-up framework of a settlement by fields, roads or other clear boundaries.”*
3. The emerging Local Plan Single Issue Review does not propose to update or amend any of the development envelopes for any of the settlements across the district. The Local Plan uses settlement boundaries (called development envelopes) drawn tightly around the existing built form of the villages and towns across the district. In this document the term settlement boundary is used throughout and reference to settlement boundary in the Local Plan means the development envelopes.
4. The Neighbourhood Plan proposes to update the settlement boundary to take account of the way in which the Parish has developed since the Local Plan was drawn up. In particular the need to clearly recognise the growth of Mepal and other planning decisions taken by the LPA which has taken place outside of the Local Plan development envelope.
5. Details of how the new settlement boundary has been drawn is out in the Settlement Boundary Methodology (this document). The methodology is drawn from the principles set out later.
6. Mepal is not proposed for growth on allocated sites in either the existing Local Plan or the Local Plan Single Issue Review. Growth in Mepal under Policy GROWTH 2: Locational strategy of the Local Plan looks for more limited development to take place in villages which have a defined development envelope, thereby helping to support local services, shops and community needs. Within the defined development envelopes housing, employment and other development to meet local needs will normally be permitted - provided there is no significant adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area and that all other material planning considerations are satisfied. Then under Policy GROWTH 2, outside defined development envelopes, development will be strictly controlled, having regard to the need to protect the countryside and the setting of towns and villages.
7. Having regard to the Policy GROWTH 2, continued speculative development outside of the settlement boundary has the potential to undermine the strategic policies of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. It also has the potential to affect the distinctive character of Mepal. The strategic policies of the Local Plan and the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan will be best served by Mepal having an up-to-date settlement boundary.

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Methodology



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Policies Map (April 2015) Mepal (Insert Map 8.28)
Key:

Development Envelope	SSSI; Area of International Importance for Wildlife;
County Wildlife Site	Mineral Safeguarding Area
Special Area of Conservation	Waste Consultation Area



East Cambridgeshire
District Council



Not to scale

Development Envelope in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2015)

8. For Mepal, a settlement boundary is proposed to be identified to define the existing built-up area of the village having regard to the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan criteria in paragraph 3.3.5. The settlement boundary serves a specific purpose in that it is intended to direct the growth of the settlements and enable development to take place in a coherent manner, maintaining the structure and form of the existing settlement geography as the Local Plan envisages. In addition, the boundary will protect the character and landscape setting of the settlement.

The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Review

9. To conform with the strategic policies of the Local Plan there is a need to steer future development towards the locations that the Local Plan identifies for growth. Policy GROWTH 2 of the Local Plan states: *“The majority of development will be focused on the market towns of Ely, Soham and Littleport. Ely is the most significant service and population centre in the district, and will be a key focus for housing, employment and retail growth.”* Given the proposed role for villages such as Mepal in the Local Plan it is considered reasonable as part of a balanced approach to devise a settlement boundary to define the physical extent of the existing community of Mepal and the countryside beyond.
10. The ‘development envelope’ for Mepal in the Local Plan is now dated and notably planning permissions have been granted along Bridge Road outside of the development envelope. As such an updated development envelope would reflect the current position. The Single-Issue Review Local Plan does not propose to update the development envelope; therefore, it is appropriate for the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan to look to update the development envelope. For clarity the Neighbourhood Plan will call this the ‘Settlement Boundary’.
11. Mepal is a traditional village, the northern end focussed on the old river bridge crossing including the Three Pickerels public house is partly within the designated Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar sites which are part of the ‘National Sites Network’. This is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The parts of the village within these designated sites are not included within the settlement boundary identified in the Neighbourhood Plan.
12. The Parish of Mepal includes a group of properties along Mepal Road around White Gate Farm. This is a small group of houses in the countryside as the Local Plan envisages in paragraph 3.3.5; so, this group of properties is not included within the settlement boundary.

Settlement Boundary Purpose

13. The Neighbourhood Plan uses settlement boundaries as a policy tool for ensuring the right type of development in the right place. National planning policy encourages sustainable patterns of development and resists inappropriate development in locations where it might cause harm to the local area. These are key underlying principles that will need to be borne in mind when reviewing the existing settlement boundary and developing a new settlement boundary.

14. The settlement boundary is defined in the Neighbourhood Plan; this settlement boundary is used to update the ‘development envelope’ for Mepal. It serves the purpose of directing the growth of the settlement and protecting the countryside from encroachment.

Settlement Boundary Criteria

15. The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan does set out a comprehensive definition of how it defined the ‘development envelope’; in paragraphs 3.3.4 and 3.3.5 the Local Plan gives a broad overview. Regard has been had to this broad overview as the criteria used in the Local Plan in drawing the settlement boundary around the existing built form of the village as it now exists.
16. The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Review has taken into account the broad criteria in the Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Review seeks to define the updated ‘development envelope’ for Mepal as such it is based on the following principles together with the following inclusion and exclusion criteria in the methodology as follows:

Principles

- Boundary drawn tightly around built form, be easily identifiable and (normally) follow property boundaries and permanent features;
- Follow defined physical features; and
- Need not be continuous; potentially two or more separate elements but excludes small outlying pockets of development or groups of properties that are clearly detached from the settlement.

Areas which have been included are:

- Any allocations for residential, employment or mixed-use development in the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan;
- Built and commenced residential and community facilities development such as religious buildings schools and community halls, that are physically related to the settlement;
- Built and commenced employment development that is physically related to the settlement;
- Existing committed sites that benefit from planning permission;
- The curtilage of a property that relates more closely to the built environment (e.g. a garden) or has limited capacity to extend the built form of the settlement in terms of scale and location; and
- Recreational or amenity space at the edge of a settlement that relates more closely to the built environment and is an integral part of the settlement.

Areas which have been excluded are:

- Employment development, farm buildings and farmyards, at the edge of the village that is not physically well related to the settlement;
- Isolated development that is physically detached from the settlement (including farm buildings or agricultural buildings and renewable energy installations);
- The extended curtilage of a property that relates more closely to the open countryside (e.g. a field or paddock) or has the capacity to substantially extend the built form of the settlement in terms of scale and location;
- Important gaps;
- Land within the designated ‘National Sites Network’ consisting of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA’s); together

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with areas within the internationally designated Ramsar sites or are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);

- Recreational or amenity space at the edge of the settlement that relates more closely to the open countryside;
- Camping and caravanning sites unless they have permanent year-round residential occupancy; and
- Proposed or built rural exception sites for affordable housing.

17. The above methodology criteria were developed taking into account the principles set out in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. In addition, other made Neighbourhood Plans in East Cambridgeshire were considered, many of which have updated the development envelopes from the Local Plan.

18. The criteria have then been applied based on local knowledge. How the criteria have been applied is explained in more detail in Appendix 1.

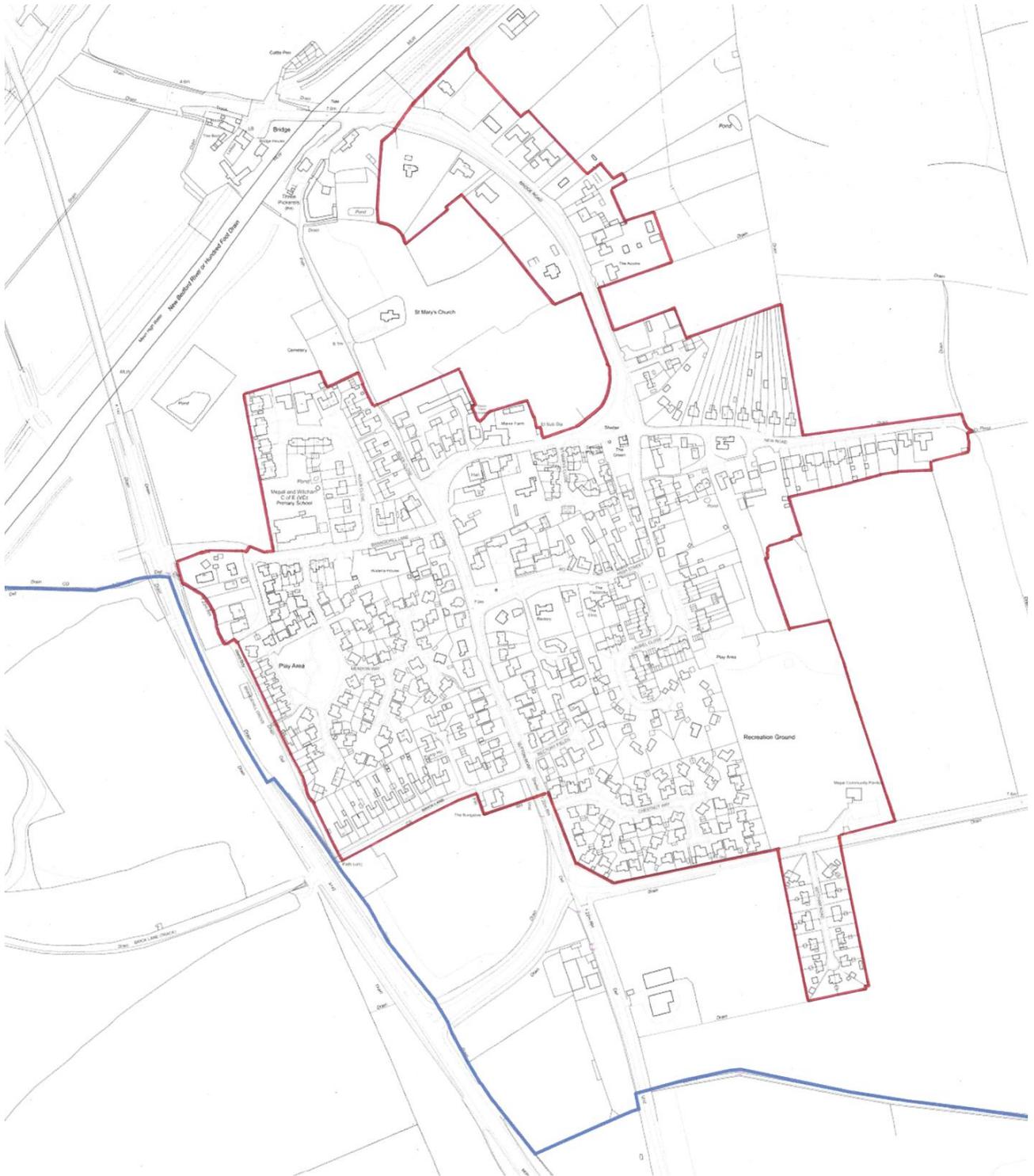
The Proposed Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary

19. The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary for Mepal is set out on the Map below.

Consultation on the Proposed Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary

20. Alongside the draft Neighbourhood Plan the Settlement Boundary Methodology will be published for consultation alongside Policy 1 which sets out the relevant policy framework.

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Methodology



Map - Settlement Boundary
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 Settlement Boundary

 Plan Area Boundary

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Appendix 1 - The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Criteria

21. The Neighbourhood Plan Settlement Boundary Criteria have been applied in the following manner:

Principles	Implementation
Boundary drawn tightly around built form, be easily identifiable and (normally) follow property boundaries and permanent features	Where practical the boundary will include the whole curtilage of a property in recognition of the combined status of properties and their curtilages as a single planning unit. Exceptions are set out below for determining the boundary around extensive properties on the edge of the built-up area to reflect the difference in character between parts of the grounds closely related to the property, for instance containing features that have a more natural countryside character.
Follow defined physical features	Follows field boundaries; garden boundaries; road boundaries; and airfield tracks.
Need not be continuous; potentially two or more separate elements but excludes small outlying pockets of development that are clearly detached from the settlement	<p>Applying this methodology, there would be either one or two main built up areas that can be identified and mapped within the Parish. This depends upon whether or not the Recreation Ground is included or not; this means that Nos.1 to 22 Witcham Road are either a separate area or not. The group of properties along Mepal Road around White Gate Farm are excluded. This is a small group of houses in the countryside as the Local Plan envisages in paragraph 3.3.5; so, this group of properties is not included within the settlement boundary.</p> <p>There are a few other properties in the Parish which are physically separated from the main part of the existing settlements so have been excluded.</p>
Areas Included	Implementation
Any allocations for residential, employment or mixed-use development in the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan	The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan includes no such allocations in Mepal. The Neighbourhood Plan also does not propose any such site allocations.
Built and commenced residential and community facilities development such as religious buildings schools and community halls, that are physically related to the settlement	The majority of buildings within the settlement boundary fall within this category. It is included for the sake of completeness as most attention is paid to determining where the edges of the built-up area are. Applying this methodology, the settlement boundary

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - Settlement Boundary Methodology

	has been identified and mapped within the Parish.
Built and commenced employment development that is physically related to the settlement. Farm buildings and farmyards that are within the streetscene of the village and are that physically well related to the settlement	There are no such employment areas in Mepal. Laurel Farm on New Road forms part of the streetscene and the overall curtilage has a residential character and is physically well related to the settlement.
Existing committed sites that benefit from planning permission	<p>There are a few such areas along Bridge Road which need to be included. 21/00328/FUL is under construction at present. 18/00909/OUT included four plots, one of these plots remains undeveloped and has been included within the proposed settlement boundary.</p> <p>The existing committed sites are based on those with planning permission as of December 2022. At this time there two applications still pending 22/01213/FUL at 7A High Street and 22/00561/FUL at Broadmead Boarding Kennels. Neither of these if granted would have any impact on the settlement boundary proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan.</p>
The curtilage of a property that relates more closely to the built environment (e.g. a garden) or has limited capacity to extend the built form of the settlement in terms of scale and location	Some large gardens exist; however, these gardens are closely related to the property both visually and functionally.
Recreational or amenity space at the edge of a settlement that relates more closely to the built environment and is an integral part of the settlement	Some greenfield uses such as recreational or amenity open space, churchyards, wide grass verges and allotments, can form an integral and valuable part of the built-up area and its character. Typically, where these have been included, they have buildings on at least three sides and have a clear physical and visual relationship with the built-up area rather than any adjoining countryside. The Recreation Ground is strongly enclosed and is considered to relate more strongly to the settlement than the countryside.
Areas Excluded	Implementation
Employment development, farm buildings and farmyards, at the edge of the village that is not physically well related to the settlement	Agricultural buildings tend to relate more to the surrounding countryside when still in use for agricultural purposes.
Isolated development that is physically detached from the settlement (including farm buildings or agricultural buildings and renewable energy installations)	To avoid areas of intervening countryside being unnecessarily included within the built-up area properties which are physically or visually detached should be excluded. Outlying properties at Mepal Road around White Gate Farm which are physically separated from the

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	main part of the existing settlement have been treated as isolated and outside the built-up area. Therefore, they are excluded from the settlement boundary. The agricultural buildings south of Sutton Road and Witcham Road are excluded because they do not relate physically to the village.
The extended curtilage of a property that relates more closely to the open countryside (e.g. a field or paddock) or has the capacity to substantially extend the built form of the settlement in terms of scale and location	Some large gardens exist; however, these gardens are generally closely related to the property both visually and functionally.
Important gaps	These spaces can provide a visual buffer between built development and the open countryside, softening the visual impact and linking the built-up area with its rural context. Undeveloped gaps in the streetscene have been excluded.
Land within the designated 'National Sites Network' consisting of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA's); together with areas within the internationally designated Ramsar sites or are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);	Land within the designated boundary of the Ouse Washes has been excluded as additional built development may result in harm to biodiversity. As such the grouping of properties around the Three Pickerels Pub and Mepal Bridge that lie within the SAC boundary have been excluded.
Recreational or amenity space at the edge of the settlement that relates more closely to the open countryside	Areas of open space, sports and recreational facilities, paddocks, allotments, caravan sites, churchyards and cemeteries provide a visual buffer between the built form and the open countryside, softening the visual impact and linking the built-up area with its rural context. Such land is generally considered to primarily relate to the countryside where it is encompassed by built development on two sides or less. The Church and Cemetery visually look part of the countryside so have been excluded on this basis.
Camping and caravanning sites unless they have permanent year-round residential occupancy	There are no such sites presently in Mepal.
Proposed or built rural exception sites for affordable housing	These sites where allowed are intended to be allowed as 'exceptions', therefore they should remain excluded from settlement boundaries to reflect this status. There are no such sites presently in Mepal.

Appendix 2 - The Proposed New Allotment Site

22. There are 12 Allotment plots located at the back of the Play Park and bordered by gardens in Laurel Close. Currently all plots are rented out and the Parish Council are operating a waiting list. Due to an ongoing level of demand the Parish Council has been actively exploring options to provide additional land for allotments. The Neighbourhood Plan allocates land for additional allotments in Policy 3. How the site was chosen is explained in the Settlement Boundary Methodology (this document).



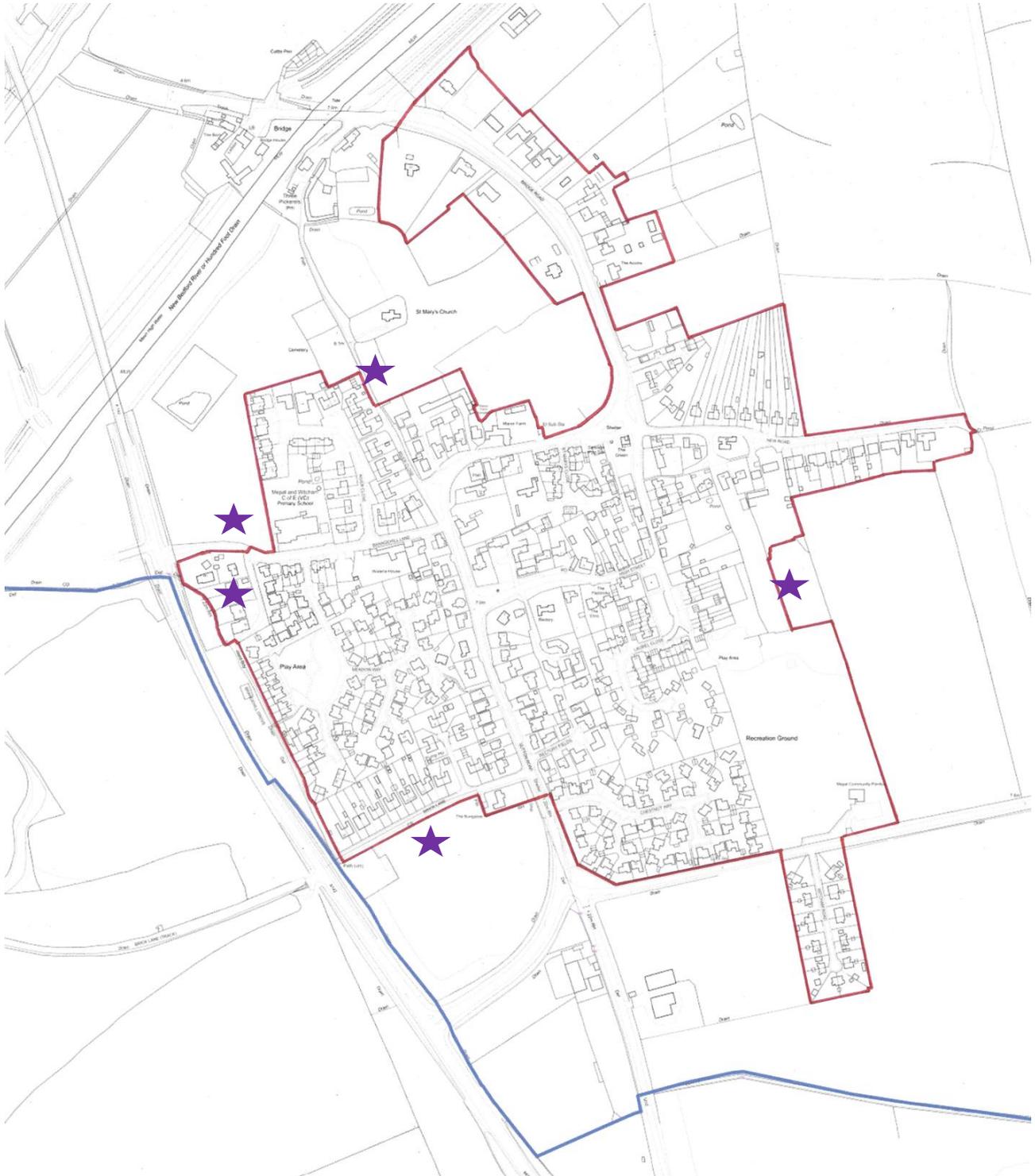
Map - Existing and Proposed Allotments © Crown Copyright

 Proposed and Existing Allotments  Plan Area Boundary

23. The existing allotment site is subject to surface water flooding from surface water run-off which impacts on its usability. Ideally the Parish Council would like to expand the allotment provision on a site which could facilitate the relocation of the existing allotments as well as allowing the expansion of additional allotment plots to meet the currently unmet demand.

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24. The Parish Council have explored options for a potential new site for allotments. In terms of functional requirements, a site which has a direct frontage to a road so it is accessible both by foot and by vehicle would be an enhancement as this would allow users to be able to make use of vehicles to bring heavy supplies such as compost or fertiliser. A site within or immediately adjacent to the settlement boundary of the main core of the village was considered the most appropriate for accessibility. The existing allotments measure around 800m² so a site larger than this is necessary to facilitate relocation and additional provision.



Map - Possible Allotment Sites Considered © Crown Copyright

- Settlement Boundary
- Plan Area Boundary
- ★ Possible Allotment Sites Considered

25. The consideration of alternatives has included: Land adjacent to the existing allotments; land between 20 and 24 Brangehill Lane; land south of St Mary's Church; land north of Brangehill Lane; and land south of Brick Lane.
26. The Land adjacent to the existing allotments was discounted due to surface water flood risk and a lack of a direct frontage to a road making accessibility difficult. The land between 20 and 24 Brangehill Lane is too small and it would remove an obvious windfall plot for housing. The land north of Brangehill Lane is partly subject to surface water flood risk, it is also not self-contained in any way and would artificially subdivide a larger area of land. The land south of Brick Lane is also partly subject to surface water flood risk. It is also not self-contained in any way and would artificially subdivide a larger area of productive farmland.
27. The land south of St Mary's Church was chosen as the preferred site because it is not subject to surface water flood risk, it has a direct road frontage, it reflects similar use as the burial ground opposite and there are existing vegetation which makes the site chosen already partly self-contained from the wider land to the east. The site measures around 2,000m² so provides sufficient space to accommodate both the potential relocation of the existing allotments and the provision of additional plots. This site is located on the edge of Church of England land, partly used for intermittent livery, with easy access and the possibility of leasing or buying a small strip of land for a full relocation of the existing allotments and expansion.
28. The provision of managed allotments on the land south of St Mary's Church could take place without adversely harming the important view and vista 'River Close (a.k.a Church Lane) - Looking North to the Church of St Mary' identified in Policy 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan. This is because the verdant nature of this view will not be materially changed.
29. This site lies within the setting of the Grade II* Church of St Mary, the Church is set within its own defined Churchyard curtilage but has a functional relationship to the Graveyard and Graveyard extension to the west. The Church setting is largely an undeveloped verdant area, this setting will be retained through the allotment use provided that those allotments are effectively managed. Such management would be undertaken by Mepal Parish Council and will include restrictions on erecting buildings or other structures in order to protect the setting of the Listed Church.
30. As the preferred site for allocation comments on the choice will be sought at the draft plan stage.

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The Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Mepal produced in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012



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