

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Although Worthing is a predominantly urban area, the countryside that is within the Borough boundary is of particular importance and quality. The countryside is defined as all land outside of the Built Up Area Boundary. Most of this countryside lies within either the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or one of the strategic gaps to the east and west of the town. The countryside should be protected for its own sake. This can be achieved by preserving and enhancing the physical character of the countryside, including the strategic gaps and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, by the protection and management of areas of natural interest, and by protecting the best areas of agricultural land from irreversible loss. These objectives are spelt out in the Aims and Objectives of the Plan. The countryside can also be viewed as a limited and non-renewable resource. By directing development to within the Built Up Area Boundary, journeys can be made more efficient. Therefore, countryside policies can be seen as helping to meet the aims of sustainable development.
- 3.2 Although protection is required, the countryside also needs to adapt to changing circumstances. A policy framework is required for those activities and developments which may take place within the countryside, such as, development related to agriculture, horticulture or forestry; and the alteration or extension of existing buildings.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- 3.3 Planning legislation places a duty on local authorities to ensure that development plans include policies on the conservation of natural beauty and amenity of land. Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 - The Countryside Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development states that local authorities should seek to:-
- encourage economic activity in rural areas where appropriate;
 - conserve and improve the landscape, and encourage opportunities for recreation;
 - conserve diversity of wildlife, particularly by protecting and enhancing habitats;
 - achieve good quality development which respects the character of the countryside.

West Sussex Structure Plan

- 3.4 The Adopted West Sussex Structure Plan 1993 and the West Sussex Structure Plan Review provide the context for the Worthing Local Plan 2003 policies and draw attention to the need to protect the countryside for its own sake, and for special protection for certain areas while allowing for some changes - for example, for rural diversification.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.5 It is important that the countryside is protected for its own sake. Development in the countryside needs to be strictly controlled, and will only be permitted where a countryside location is justified - that is, uses which must take place in that location due to their nature, such as agriculture or forestry, or certain other exceptions such as informal recreation, in line with Structure Plan policy. If development is justified, proposals must be sensitive to their location in terms of type of activity, siting and appearance.
- 3.6 Opportunities should be taken to not only conserve, but also to improve areas of the countryside - for example, through the planting of native species of trees where appropriate. If opportunities arise through development, Worthing Borough Council will encourage the enhancement of the countryside. This can be achieved through landscape improvements and the screening or removal of eyesores, particularly where these are prominent in the landscape.

POLICY C1

Development will not be permitted outside the BUAB as defined on the Proposals Map unless:

- (i) it is specifically identified elsewhere in the Plan; or**
- (ii) a countryside location for the proposed development is justified.**

Any development permitted should respect form, scale and character of the landscape and not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or generate an unacceptable level of pollution by way of noise or sources of artificial light that would be out of keeping with its countryside location.

THE SUSSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

- 3.7 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are nationally designated areas of countryside, the primary objective of designation being conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. The majority of Worthing's countryside north of the A27 lies within the Sussex Downs AONB, as indicated on the Proposals Map. The environmental effects of new proposals within the AONB must be a major consideration. PPG 7 indicates, however, that it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social well being of the area. The guidance also notes that it would normally be inconsistent with the aims of designation to permit siting of major industrial or commercial development in the AONB. Only proven national interest and lack of alternative sites can justify an exception. These principles are incorporated into the policy set out below. In addition, consideration is given to opportunities to maintain or reinstate the landscape quality of the area.
- 3.8 Major developments are likely to be inconsistent with the national designation of the AONB. Any applications for them will be rigorously tested against the criteria set out in policy C2.

- 3.9 Under the provisions of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Environmental Impact Assessments) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, applications within, or partly in sensitive locations such as the AONB will need to be accompanied by environmental assessments. The assessment will ensure that all significant environmental implications are analysed from the outset. The environmental statement provided by the developer will help provide a basis for better decision making.
- 3.10 Special consideration will be given to advertising in the AONB to ensure it is in sympathy with the natural beauty of the landscape. In some areas, greater control over advertising exists by virtue of the defined “Areas of Special Control of Advertisements”.

POLICY C2

(a) Development which would be harmful to the nationally important visual quality and locally distinctive characteristics of the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted unless:-

- (i) it is essential to meet local, social and/or economic needs; or**
- (ii) in the case of major industrial or commercial developments, it can be demonstrated that the development is in the national interest and that there is no alternative site available elsewhere:-**

and in respect to both (i) and (ii), the adverse effects on the AONB are kept to a minimum and the harm to the natural beauty of the landscape is not unacceptable.

(b) Any development permitted will be required to be in sympathy with the landscape and designed and sited so as to enhance visual quality and not prejudice the enjoyment of the area by causing an unacceptable level of pollution from sources of noise or artificial light.

- 3.11 It is not only development within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which must be carefully considered. The setting of the AONB is also important, and development which is proposed in its vicinity will be carefully considered. Development will not be permitted if it is unduly prominent or if it detracts from views into or out of the protected area.

POLICY C3

Development outside but near to the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will not be permitted if it would

cause an unacceptable adverse impact or if it would detract from views into or out of the designated area (particularly from road, right of way or other public places) or if it would otherwise cause unacceptable harm to the public enjoyment of it.

- 3.12 The Sussex Downs Conservation Board is responsible for countryside management and access throughout the Sussex Downs AONB. Its overall objectives include the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the Sussex Downs AONB, including its physical, ecological and cultural landscape. The Board is consulted on significant policy matters and planning applications. The Board has produced a Landscape Assessment of the AONB. This provides guidance on assessing development proposals in the AONB, and helps judge whether a scheme is likely to damage the particular landscape character of the area. The Council will have regard to the Landscape Assessment in assessing development proposals. Developments will need to comply with Policy C2 of the 1993 Structure Plan in addition to Policy C2 above before or when submitting proposals within the AONB.

PROTECTION OF HIGH GRADE AGRICULTURAL LAND

- 3.13 The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, whose functions have now been transferred to The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, classifies the quality of agricultural land. High grade agricultural land is defined as land within grades 1, 2 and 3a. PPG7 and the more recent guidance set out in the Rural White Paper endorse Central Government's long-standing policy to protect 'best and most versatile' agricultural land from development, as a national resource. Government advice also recognises that land used for some "soft" uses such as golf courses cannot usually be returned to high quality agricultural land and such uses are therefore, unlikely to be acceptable on high grade land. Worthing's agricultural land generally ranges from Grade 2 to Grade 3B.

POLICY C4

Development will not be permitted if it would result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land unless:

- (i) there is an overriding need for development;**
- (ii) there is a lack of development opportunities in already developed areas;**
- (iii) there is insufficient land in grades below 3a or lower grade land that does not have environmental value recognised by a statutory designation;**
- (iv) in cases where land is in ALC grades 1,2 and 3a and there is a choice of sites of different grades, development is proposed on land of the lowest grade.**

STRATEGIC GAPS

- 3.14 The strategic gaps to the east and west of Worthing have long been subject to the most stringent policies of protection. Strategic gap policy has been reviewed recently and the most up to date framework is now provided by the West Sussex Structure Plan Review. The objectives of strategic gaps are to prevent coalescence and retain the separate identity and amenity of settlements and protect the undeveloped coastline. Whilst the Structure Plan indicates the broad location of these gaps, it is the function of local plans to define precisely their boundaries. In defining the gaps between Worthing and Sompting / Lancing to the east and Worthing and Ferring to the west, careful consideration has been given to the boundary of the Built Up Area, and the contribution that land outside of that area makes towards meeting the objectives of strategic gaps. The resulting boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map.
- 3.15 Development will not be permitted in a strategic gap unless it meets each of three tests. There must be justification for the development either in terms of local social and/or economic need or national interest. If such justification exists, there must be no alternative site suitable for the proposals available elsewhere. If both of these tests are met, the proposal will still not be acceptable if it compromises the objectives and fundamental integrity of the strategic gap, either on its own or in conjunction with other development.

POLICY C5

Development in the strategic gaps will not be permitted unless:-

- (i) it is to meet demonstrable local, social and/or economic needs or is of proven national interest; and**
- (ii) there are no alternative sites available elsewhere; and**
- (iii) it would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the strategic gap.**

URBAN FRINGE

- 3.16 The definition of the BUAB and specific policies relating to the Countryside and Brooklands give detailed guidance on the approach to development on the urban fringe. A policy relating specifically to this issue is, therefore, not necessary.

RURAL DIVERSIFICATION

- 3.17 Agriculture in Britain, which in the past played such a great part in shaping the countryside landscape, is rapidly changing. It no longer provides significant employment opportunities. PPG 7 states that the need to diversify the rural economy is an important issue in providing job opportunities for those who would once have worked in agriculture and related areas - whilst protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land. Potential areas of diversification include the development of tourist or leisure-based activities.
- 3.18 Farm diversification allows farms to continue operating, meeting employment need and continuing to play an important role in the management of the

countryside. There will be few opportunities for rural diversification within Worthing. Those which do exist must be sensitively handled, as much of Worthing's countryside is subject to special designations.

- 3.19 Any proposals for diversification by existing farms must be sympathetic to their countryside location and landscape, and must comply with all other relevant policies. The priority for rural diversification schemes is to allow farms to continue farming, and therefore to be able to manage the landscape. "Whole Farm Plans" can be used to develop a holistic approach to the future operation of a farm and a diversification project. Such plans identify how to achieve an economic return from a holding, while managing the land in an acceptable manner. They can be used to demonstrate how a proposal relates to the existing farm and landscape management, for the purpose of a planning application.
- 3.20 Any proposals for diversification projects will be judged in relation to policies contained in this plan, including those relating to the countryside, the AONB, strategic gaps and recreation. The requirements of these policies will not carry any less weight because an application relates to a farm diversification scheme, although an appropriate and acceptable farm diversification scheme can be a justification for a countryside location.

POLICY C6

Proposals for the diversification of existing farm and horticultural businesses will be permitted providing that:-

- (i) the proposal is in keeping with the rural character and landscape, and retains or enhances the landscape and/or nature conservation interests;**
- (ii) existing buildings are used as far as possible and any new buildings are well related in terms of design, scale and location, to existing buildings or groups of buildings;**
- (iii) they comply with other policies in the Plan;**
- (iv) the proposed use does not inhibit the agricultural use of an existing unit;**
- (v) the proposed use does not generate a level of traffic movement which is out of keeping with its countryside location; and**
- (vi) there is no adverse impact on the amenity of nearby residents.**

NEW BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.21 Although new buildings in the countryside will not normally be permitted, there will be occasions when new buildings are necessary for the efficient operation of farms, horticulture or forestry. Many farm buildings can be constructed without planning permission under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. In those cases which are subject to planning control, care must be taken over the design and siting of farm buildings, particularly if the site is in the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a strategic gap.

POLICY C7

New buildings for which there is an operational need by a local farm or horticultural business will be permitted provided that the scale, design, siting and materials are satisfactory and provided the development complies with all relevant policies within this Plan. Where such buildings are permitted, they should be sited adjacent to existing buildings or building groups, rather than be isolated in the landscape.

EXISTING BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.22 Changes in farming practice sometimes result in existing buildings becoming redundant. The conversion of such buildings to other uses may be an economical use of resources, and can contribute to the rural economy. Although Worthing does not have a rural economy in its own right, those businesses situated outside of the town's Built-Up Area boundary contribute to a wider economy. Alternative uses may be acceptable, providing the new use is appropriate to the countryside in both scale and character and provided that the conversion does not involve substantial new buildings or other intrusive development. Support will be given to conversion for business use; residential use will be less acceptable in terms of requiring greater alteration or reconstruction to buildings, and creating residential curtilage in the countryside. The structural condition and appearance of the building to be converted will be a key issue. It must be capable of conversion without requiring substantial reconstruction. If the existing building has a significant adverse impact on the landscape, improvements may be secured when a proposal to convert the building is submitted.
- 3.23 Both of these considerations are particularly important for residential conversions. These can give rise to significant problems and should be assessed with particular care. For example, residential conversions in the countryside are likely to be unacceptable where they result in a significant alteration to the appearance of the building or the creation of a residential curtilage in the countryside. Such developments can have a detrimental impact on an area's appearance, particularly in sensitive areas with a high landscape value, such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Proposals for the conversion of existing buildings in the countryside will be judged in relation to all policies contained in this Plan, including those relating to the countryside, the AONB, strategic gaps and recreation. The requirements of these policies will not carry less weight because an application relates to conversion. However, the re-use of an existing building can be a justification for a countryside location.

POLICY C8

The conversion of existing buildings in the countryside to alternative uses will be permitted provided that:-

- (i) it is demonstrated that the building is of permanent and sound construction, is capable of a conversion which is in keeping with its original character without requiring substantial reconstruction, and is in keeping with its surroundings in terms of form, bulk, design and materials;**
- (ii) the proposed use would be appropriate in scale and character to the location concerned and would not cause significant access or environmental problems;**
- (iii) the proposal would not involve the construction of substantial new buildings or other intrusive development;**
- (iv) the proposal complies with all other relevant policies; and**
- (v) if residential use is proposed it is demonstrated that every attempt has been made to secure a suitable business re-use.**

EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS TO BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.24 It is not only new buildings which can have an impact on the countryside. Extensions and alterations to existing buildings may also have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the countryside and, therefore, need to be very carefully considered.

POLICY C9

Alterations or extensions to existing buildings which are located outside the Built Up Area Boundary as defined on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted where they respect the character, scale, form and appearance of the building and character of the area.

OTHER FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.25 Due to the lack of past or likely future pressure for farm shops, road service areas, or accommodation for agricultural workers in the Borough, no specific policies have been developed for these issues. Such proposals will be assessed in

the context of the policies of this Plan. Reference will be made to Structure Plan policies where necessary in the future.

TREES

- 3.26 Those wooded areas outside of the Built Up Area Boundary are important in terms of landscape, the provision of wildlife habitats, and have amenity value. Some of these areas are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Policy BE15 of Chapter 5 relates to the protection of trees in the Borough.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- 3.27 As paragraph 3.5 explains, development within the countryside must be justified, and must respect the form, scale, and character of the landscape. Telecommunications development generally constitutes an urban, utilitarian form of development at odds with the countryside, which would not normally be acceptable. However, Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 - Telecommunications, promotes a positive stance towards the development of telecommunications facilities and states that the technical requirements of operators should be recognised. Policies within Chapter 5 relate to telecommunications development