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# **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

**Meeting the needs of the  
District's rural communities**

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**The operation of Policy COM.1  
in the Stratford-on-Avon District  
Local Plan Review**



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# Supplementary Planning Guidance

## Meeting the needs of the District's rural communities

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### The operation of Policy COM.1 in the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review

#### 1. Status

- 1.1 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) was approved by the District Council on 14 April 2003 and became fully operational from that date.
- 1.2 Policy IMP.2 in the District Local Plan Review provides the context for the publication of this SPG.

#### 2. Introduction : Local Choice - Local Responsibility

- 2.1 Policy COM.1 in the District Local Plan Review deals with the principle of 'local choice'. It provides rural communities in Stratford District with an important opportunity to help shape their future. It enables them to identify and determine how their development needs can best be met.
- 2.2 This guidance:
  - outlines the new opportunity presented to local communities through the Local Plan Review; and
  - explains how this new approach will be applied in relation to individual planning applications. It amplifies the provisions of the Local Plan Review.
- 2.3 Through the promotion and production of Parish Plans<sup>1</sup> it is anticipated that specific needs will be identified which can form the justification for a development proposal that would otherwise be contrary to policy. Communities may also identify other forms of 'need' to meet the aspirations of their residents and which the planning process can help to deliver.
- 2.4 The approach embodied in the principle of local choice provides an opportunity to counter instances of relative deprivation within rural communities in the District. Research undertaken by the District Council through its Anti-Poverty Strategy has identified the lack of affordable housing, pockets of unemployment and poor access to services, often compounded by the lack of reliable public transport.
- 2.5 All communities are encouraged to prepare Parish Plans (or equivalent) and to keep them under review. It is anticipated that Parish Plans will:
  - identify particular needs that a community wishes to have met;
  - promote or support specific locations where these needs can be met; and
  - provide guidance on the nature and form of such development to assist the preparation of detailed schemes.

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<sup>1</sup> It is anticipated that Parish Plans will gradually replace Parish Appraisals over time as communities respond to the initiative which is being promoted by the Countryside Agency and local authorities. The term Parish Plan used in this guidance also covers Parish Appraisals that have been produced.

The Countryside Agency has published **Parish Plans – guidance for town and parish councils**, which includes a guidance booklet and a resource pack. It is available on the Agency's website: [www.countryside.gov.uk/vitalvillages](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/vitalvillages).

- 2.6 At the heart of Policy COM.1 is the principle that in the Main Rural Centres (MRCs) and Local Centre Villages (LCVs), as identified in Policy STR.1 in the Local Plan Review, there is a restraint on residential and industrial development which could, nevertheless, be relaxed in order to meet a local need identified by the local community.
- 2.7 The MRCs identified in Policy STR.1 are: Alcester, Bidford-on-Avon, Henley-in-Arden, Kineton, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam, Studley and Wellesbourne.
- 2.8 A list of LCVs current at the time of publication of this guidance is provided as an Appendix.

### **3. What is meant by 'local need' ?**

- 3.1 'Local need' could take various forms, for example:
  - It is anticipated that housing needs, particularly the need for affordable housing, will feature prominently in Parish Plans. Specific guidance on this important topic is therefore provided in Section 5 of this guidance.
  - The need for improved employment opportunities particularly for local people and in support of rural businesses. However, the relationship between jobs and the availability of housing needs to be carefully considered. It is also necessary to acknowledge that the planning process is not generally able to control the occupancy of buildings in business use.
  - A range of community facilities would be eligible for consideration, including public open space, leisure, retail and health. In many cases there is unlikely to be an objection in principle to such proposals, but an explanation of the need identified would be useful in clarifying the purpose of such facilities.
  - In addition, opportunities may arise for schemes to secure significant environmental improvements to the physical fabric of the area. However, such schemes should be essentially local in impact and not be based on a proposal for development that would have wider implications.
- 3.2 For smaller rural settlements the view is taken that there are insufficient facilities available to support sustainable forms of activity and therefore it would be inappropriate to encourage additional development. However, it remains valid for such communities to identify a specific need for social housing through the provisions of Policy CTY.5 in the Local Plan Review.
- 3.3 It should be appreciated that certain types of local need could be identified for Stratford-upon-Avon which would not be secured as a matter of course through the site specific proposals in the Local Plan Review, eg. education, health, leisure. The merits of schemes which seek to satisfy such needs should be given thorough consideration and may justify a flexible operation of policies in the Review.

### **4. Basis of the 'local choice' approach**

- 4.1 At the outset it should be stressed that the principle embodied in Policy COM.1 is one of being community-led; it is the community that should be identifying the 'need' in the first place rather than the landowner/developer making the first move.
- 4.2 It is reasonable, however, for a landowner/developer to respond to a 'need' that has been identified by a community and to propose how it might be satisfied. Parties who wish to promote a scheme are advised to first contact the relevant Parish Council, and any body which has been set up by the community to produce a Parish Plan, to discuss their ideas.
- 4.3 When a scheme comes forward purporting to meet a local need it will be assessed against the relevant Parish Plan that has been adopted by the District Council as a material planning consideration. Provided the proposal is consistent with the provisions of the Parish Plan, and the criteria of Policy COM.1 and other relevant planning considerations, the application will normally be supported.
- 4.4 There may be circumstances where a proposal cannot readily be assessed against a Parish Plan, for example:
  - a Parish Plan, or up-to-date review, may not have been published or may be in the course of being prepared;

- a Parish Plan may have been published but may not deal with the matter in sufficient detail, if at all; or
  - opportunities may arise which could not have been anticipated and need to be reacted to expeditiously, eg. the redevelopment of a 'bad neighbour' use.
- 4.5 It is appropriate for the merits of schemes to be assessed in any of these circumstances, as the explanation to Policy COM.1 acknowledges. Section 6(B) provides guidance on the procedure to be followed in such cases.

## **5. Meeting housing needs**

- 5.1 Because it is anticipated that meeting the housing needs of local residents will feature as a high priority in most Parish Plans, further specific information on this topic has been included in this guidance.
- 5.2 The Government definition of housing need refers to households 'living in housing which is inadequate or unsuitable, who are unlikely to be able to meet their needs in the housing market without some assistance.' (DETR, 2000)
- 5.3 Appraisal exercises to prepare Parish Plans provide an ideal opportunity to gauge local housing needs. The Parish Plan itself can then put forward proposals for meeting those needs. Most often the requirement is likely to be for affordable housing. Advice on assessing housing needs is available from the contacts listed in Section 8. Warwickshire Rural Community Council employs a Rural Housing Enabler to promote the provision of affordable homes in rural communities.
- 5.4 Examples of the types of housing need that could be identified include:
- Affordable housing for local people, for example, to enable young families to remain living in a village. Warwickshire Rural Housing Association specialises in providing this type of accommodation. Parish Plans could indicate any preferences of the local community in terms of occupancy restrictions on such homes and/or the type and size of accommodation needed.
  - Specialised types of housing, for example sheltered accommodation or homes for 'key workers'.
  - Open market housing, although it is emphasised that this must reflect a local need identified as part of the appraisal process, ie. the type and size of the proposed dwellings should reflect the nature of the housing need identified.
- 5.5 To set this matter in context, it is emphasised that the scale of housing development which it is anticipated might be met through the operation of Policy COM.1 is very limited. The strategy of the Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011 to concentrate new housing in urban areas would be undermined if this was not to be the case.
- 5.6 When considering individual planning applications, it will be necessary to assess the extent to which the open market component of local housing need has already been met in that part of the District since the start of the plan period in 1996. Policy GD.3 in the Warwickshire Structure Plan provides more detailed guidance on the basis of such an assessment.

## **6. Procedure for assessing proposals**

- 6.1 This section provides advice to applicants and other interested parties on how the District Council will assess the merits of individual proposals. It also draws attention to the information that will be required as part of, or in support of, an application.
- 6.2 A number of standard steps need to be followed to ensure that proposals are assessed in a consistent and transparent manner. This procedure may initially take effect before an application is submitted and it is important to advise the potential applicant and/or the community involved of the approach to be taken. Within this framework there may be specific matters that need to be addressed in a particular way depending on the case in question.
- 6.3 The key principle to be applied throughout this process is the requirement to provide substantive reasons for supporting the proposal, in the context of a general restraint over development in rural parts of the District.

- 6.4 It is also important to note that any community benefits that may be offered as part of a proposal must be reasonably related to the scheme in accordance with the provisions of Circular 1/97 'Planning Obligations'.
- 6.5 In assessing an individual scheme promoted under Policy COM.1, it will also be necessary to consider all other relevant issues that would have a bearing its acceptability. This includes the extent to which it complies with other planning criteria, such as access, design and impact on the character of the area.
- 6.6 In providing scope for the 'local choice' approach, it must be stressed that the District Planning Authority is remains responsible for determining planning applications. In doing so, it has to take into account a wide range of planning matters. For instance, a particular form of development may be compatible with national and local planning policies even though the local community does not support the scheme. In such cases it would be unreasonable for planning permission to be refused. In other cases, it may be necessary to refuse planning permission for a scheme that the local community supports because certain planning considerations are unduly compromised.
- 6.7 The following stages will be followed in considering a scheme:

#### **A. Pre-application checks**

1. Check whether a Parish Plan has been produced and what status it has, ie. has it been formally considered by the District Council and adopted as a material planning consideration or as supplementary planning guidance ?
2. If produced, check the extent to which the Parish Plan deals with the issues raised by the proposal, ie. is the information up-to-date, comprehensive, reliable, relevant ?
3. Decide whether the existing Parish Plan is sufficient to gauge the extent to which the scheme would meet a local need identified by the local community.
4. If not, approach the local community to discuss what form of evidence/information would be required to assess the views of the local community about the scheme.

#### **B. Producing supporting information**

1. If a relevant Parish Plan is not available, the applicant needs to investigate whether such a Plan is in preparation or is likely to be produced in the near future. If not, the applicant should seek the advice of the District Planning Authority on the information required to assess the merits of the scheme. In particular, any submission should cover:
  - the scope of research that has been carried out to establish the views of the whole local community;
  - an assessment of the match between local opinion and the scheme itself; and
  - a statement from the Parish Council expressing its position on the proposal.In the case of housing schemes, the District Council's Housing Team should be consulted. Additionally, Warwickshire Rural Housing Association should be involved.
2. Where a completed Parish Plan does not exist, the applicant is responsible for undertaking and covering the cost of carrying out research and analysing the results. The methodology used and the findings, including raw data, should be submitted with the application. It is essential that any research carried out is independent and unbiased. The evidence submitted will be verified by the District Council as appropriate.
3. It is stressed that a lobbying exercise by the applicant will not be sufficient in itself to prove the level of support for a particular scheme.

### **C. Considering the application**

1. Case officer checks the existence and status of a Parish Plan and its relevance to the particular case.
2. Case officer checks any information accompanying the application and whether it is sufficient to gauge the extent to which the scheme meets a need identified by the local community.
3. Case officer verifies any information submitted with the application regarding local opinion by contacting the Parish Council, Ward Members and other appropriate parties. In the case of schemes involving residential development, this should include the District Council's Housing Team.
4. Case officer decides whether additional information is required to assess the justification for the scheme and informs the applicant accordingly.

### **D. Processing the application**

1. If an adopted Parish Plan exists, and sufficient information is provided by which to consider the merits of the application, it can go forward for determination.
2. If no (or limited) information is provided, the case officer should advise the applicant as to what is required and request that the application be withdrawn until such information is available.
3. If the applicant is not willing to provide such information, or it is not provided within a specified period of time, the application should be processed for early determination based on the evidence available.
4. As a general rule it is not appropriate for evidence in support of an application to be submitted just before or during the Area Planning Committee. It is necessary to give sufficient time for the contents of such evidence to be assessed.
5. If an Area Planning Committee is minded to make a decision which is contrary to that recommended by the Director of Environmental Services, the application should be referred to the Planning & Regulation Committee for determination.

## **7. Standard Reason for Refusal**

It is emphasised that the District Council wishes to encourage local communities to prepare Parish Plans and it is hoped that these will result in schemes coming forward to meet identified needs. However, where the relevant criteria in Policy COM.1 and the advice in this guidance is not met, a planning application is likely to be refused for the following reason:

*Small-scale proposals to meet local housing and employment needs which are identified by a local community are encouraged in the Main Rural Centres and Local Centre Villages as defined in Policy STR.1 in the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review (Revised Deposit Draft). Insufficient evidence has been provided by the applicant in this case to demonstrate how the application is intended to meet a specific local need identified by the local community. Consequently, it is the opinion of the District Planning Authority that the application is contrary to Policy RA.3 in the Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011 and Policy COM.1 in the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review (Revised Deposit Draft).*

## **8. Sources of help and information**

### **Countryside Agency (West Midlands Region)**

1st Floor, Vincent House,  
Quay Place,  
92-93 Edward Street,  
Birmingham B1 2RA  
Telephone 0121 233 9399

### **Warwickshire Rural Community Council**

25 Stoneleigh Deer Park,  
Stareton,  
Kenilworth  
CV8 2LY  
Telephone 02476 531280

### **Warwickshire Rural Housing Association**

Whitwick Business Centre,  
Stenson Road,  
Coalville,  
Leicestershire LE67 4JP  
Telephone: 01530 276545

### **Housing Team, Environmental Services**

Stratford-on-Avon District Council.  
Telephone: 01789 260843

### **Planning and Transport Policy Team, Environmental Services**

Stratford-on-Avon District Council  
Telephone: 01789 260314

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## Appendix

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### List of Local Centre Villages (as at January 2003)

Bishops Itchington \*

Brailes

Claverdon

Ettington

Fenny Compton  
Harbury

Illmington

Lighthorne Heath

Long Compton \*

Long Itchington

Moreton Morrell

Napton-on-the-Hill

Newbold-on-Stour \*

Quinton

Salford Priors

Snitterfield \*

Stockton

Tiddington

Tysoe \*

Welford-on-Avon

Wilmcote \*

Wootton Wawen \*

*\* indicates a village with an adopted Parish Appraisal as at January 2003*



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