



**Stratford-on-Avon District
Local Development Framework
Draft Core Strategy**





Stratford-on-Avon District Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy

October 2008

The sails symbol represents

- the cyclical nature of the planning process
- the importance of renewable energy in reducing global warming
- the iconic Chesterton Windmill that stands proud in our District

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Setting the Scene

A new approach to Spatial Planning

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced a new system of plan-making called the Local Development Framework. Our LDF will eventually replace the District Local Plan, adopted in July 2006, in setting out local planning policies and proposals for development.

A fundamental aspect of the new-style LDF is that it should take a spatial approach and help to shape the places where we live, work and visit.

Planning Policy Statement 1 on Delivering Sustainable Development explains that:

'Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function.'

An LDF should also be based on a clear vision for the future of the area; how we want it to look, feel and function. The vision should reflect the distinct character of our District and the challenges we face. It should also be based on the priorities expressed by residents and communities and on clear and robust technical evidence.

Another key aspect of a spatial plan is that it should set a clear framework for private sector investment and show how public sector agencies intend to achieve their role.

The Stratford District LDF will consist of a number of documents to be produced over a period of time. The programme for preparing such documents is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme which is reviewed on a regular basis.

The Core Strategy forms the foundation for the remainder of the LDF in that it will set out the key planning principles on which other planning documents and decisions on planning applications will be based.

The Core Strategy will cover the period up to 2026 and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Achieving a 'sound' plan

It is essential that the Core Strategy we produce is appropriate and reflects the circumstances the District faces. It will be subject to independent examination on behalf of the Secretary of State where these issues will be assessed to ensure that the approach put forward by the Council is sound.

The 'tests of soundness' are set out in PPS12¹. The Core Strategy will have to show that it:

- complies with legislation in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 which lays down the procedures to be followed
- is justified, by being based on robust and credible evidence and is the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives
- is effective, in that its contents are deliverable, flexible and able to be monitored
- is consistent with national policy and in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Role of the Core Strategy

The Core Strategy should be based on a clear vision of where we want Stratford District to be in 2026 and on a set of objectives to help us get there. It should draw upon other strategies of the District Council and organisations that have implications for the use of land. One of the clear intentions of the strategy is that it should be the essential foundation for managing future development and meeting the needs of our communities.

It should contain a relatively small number of key policies, although each may cover a number of key principles. If a topic goes to the heart of the spatial vision it is likely that a policy dealing with the issue should be included. Policies in the Core Strategy will be used as a hook on which to hang more detailed policies in subsequent Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).

It is expected that a Core Strategy should not include policies that are covered in national planning policy or in the Regional Spatial Strategy unless there is clear justification for taking a different stance or to provide a specific application/interpretation.

¹ Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning, DCLG (2008)

For example, PPG2 provides a comprehensive approach to defining appropriate development in the Green Belt and the need for very special circumstances to justify other forms of development. There would be no purpose in duplicating this in a policy in the Core Strategy.

Likewise, the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision² includes policies on mitigating climate change, creating sustainable communities, ensuring sustainable design and construction, and improving air quality and sensitive ecosystems. Again, the Core Strategy need not repeat these policies but can provide a local dimension on how these issues should be considered.

It was originally intended that Core Strategies should identify broad locations for future development which should not be site specific and defined by precise boundaries. However, recent changes to the LDF system also accept that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to allocate specific strategic sites for development. These sites should be considered as central to achieving the overall strategy. We feel that it is more appropriate and helpful to identify specific sites wherever possible. What is more, given the character of Stratford District and the intended distribution of development, some of the sites to be identified may be relatively small in size but nevertheless form an important part of the strategy.

What this stage is about

This document represents an important step in preparing the Core Strategy. It is based on evidence gathered from various sources, views expressed at the Issues & Options consultation stage in Summer 2007 and the input of a wide range of agencies and organisations.

The main purpose of this document is to give everyone who is interested the opportunity to comment on the overall approach put forward, the scope of a range of policies and the proposed locations for future development.

The District Council wishes to ensure that there is thorough consultation and engagement throughout the plan-making process and particularly at key stages such as this.

For each topic covered in this document, a number of discrete options are set out unless there are clearly no reasonable alternative courses of action available. We show how these options have been assessed to date. The basis for choosing the preferred approach and the rejection of other options is explained.

All this comes together in what is known as a Sustainability Appraisal³ which assesses the pros and cons of a range of options in relation to policy topics and the form and location of future development in the District.

This document reflects the District Council's preferred approach as things stand. But we are open to the views of everyone as to whether the balance is right and the approach will achieve what is intended.

It is important to stress that, at this stage, it remains open for any interested party to express a preference for other options, including those the District Council suggests should be rejected.

The outcome of this consultation stage will go a long way to deciding the form and content of the Core Strategy itself that will be submitted to the Secretary of State and 'tested' at a public examination next year.

How you can get involved

You can comment on any part of the document but you must make it clear which topic your response relates to. We particularly welcome your views on:

- the proposed key objectives
- the suggested approach to individual policy topics, and
- the proposed locations for future development.

Your comments should ideally be made on a response form which can be obtained in a number of ways:

- On-line via the Council's website www.stratford.gov.uk
- Download a copy from the website and complete it by hand
- Ask for a copy by phoning 01789 260337
- Pick up a copy from any of the District Council offices or libraries in the District

A fresh form should be used for each topic that you wish to comment on.

²Draft Preferred Option document submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2007

³This has been produced as a companion to the Draft Core Strategy

The period for submitting comments ends on Friday 9 January 2009.

Please be aware that your response (including your name and address) cannot be treated as confidential and has to be made available for public inspection.

The national perspective

The government produces various strategy and policy documents, including Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs), which cover a wide range of subjects. We have to take what they say into account although local circumstances can justify a different approach in certain cases. Details of current government planning policies can be found on www.communities.gov.uk

The fundamental plank of government policy in relation to planning is that it should contribute to the achievement of sustainable communities as set out in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. This has five key elements:

- Living within environmental limits – respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity; improving our environment and ensuring that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society – meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities; promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion; and creating equal opportunity for all.
- Achieving a sustainable economy – building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity for all; where meeting the environmental and social costs of economic activity falls on those who impose them; ensuring efficient use of resources.
- Using sound science responsibly – ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence: taking into account scientific uncertainty through the precautionary principle; acknowledging public attitudes and values.
- Promoting good governance – actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society; engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity.

The regional perspective

The existing West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was published in June 2004 and forms part of the statutory development plan for the District.

The RSS is now being revised and updated to cover the period up to 2026. Phase Two of this revision has also reached its Preferred Option stage⁴. It has been submitted to the Secretary of State and will be the subject of an Examination in Public in due course. Phase Two deals with many important matters such as the amount and distribution of housing and employment development. It can be viewed on the Regional Assembly’s website www.wmra.gov.uk

The four major challenges identified in the current RSS are still seen to be fundamental to the future of the region, and are being taken forward into the revised version:

- Urban renaissance – making sure that the main conurbations of Birmingham, the Black Country and Coventry meet more of their own economic and social needs in order to counter the outward movement of people and jobs.
- Rural renaissance – supporting rural communities to achieve their economic and social potential whilst embracing the challenges of access and climate change.
- Diversifying and modernising the region’s economy – ensuring that opportunities for growth are linked to meeting needs and that they help to reduce social exclusion.
- Modernising the transport infrastructure – in order to support the sustainable development of the region.

The RSS Phase Two Revision contains a number of strategic policies that underpin its approach to future development and should be applied to proposals at the local level. These relate to climate change, sustainable communities and sustainable design and construction.

The Core Strategy for Stratford District is being produced in parallel with the RSS Revision and will have to be consistent with it. This means that our approach has to be sufficiently flexible to respond to changes to the RSS Revision as its preparation progresses.

⁴ Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option, West Midlands Regional Assembly (December 2007)

A new Regional Economic Strategy has also recently been published called 'Connecting to Success'. It looks to the West Midlands becoming a more prosperous region, while recognising that economic growth must support improvements to the quality of life and wellbeing of its residents. The primary focus of the strategy is on closing the gap between the poorer performance of the West Midlands compared with that of the UK as a whole. However, it does not seek economic growth at any cost but should respect environmental limits.

The local perspective

Our District lies at the heart of England. The total population of the District is 115,500 (2001 Census). The town of Stratford-upon-Avon is the largest settlement with a population of only 23,000. There are also a number of important rural centres, including the market towns of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam.

In all, there are about 250 communities of varying sizes spread across a predominately rural area covering 979 square kilometres. It is one of the largest districts in England making delivery of and access to services a major issue for residents.

Most of the District to the north of Stratford-upon-Avon lies within the West Midlands Green Belt. The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty extends into the southern fringes of the District.

Because the District covers such an extensive area, various towns outside its boundaries have a strong influence over how different parts of the area function. Royal Leamington Spa, Banbury, Redditch and Solihull all have large shopping centres, provide a wide range of employment opportunities and support a variety of leisure facilities. Conversely, the pleasant countryside and cultural attractions of our District make it an appealing place for visitors from neighbouring areas as well as from further afield.

On the strategic transport front, while the M40 cuts across the District, there is only one full junction that lies within it, at Gaydon (Junction 12). In addition, junction 16 lies to the north of Henley-in-Arden, providing access for northbound traffic only. Junction 15 at Longbridge near Warwick lies just outside the District, about six miles north-east of Stratford-upon-Avon. The other strategic route is the A46(T) which crosses the District between Evesham and Warwick and forms the northern bypass to Stratford town.

As for intercity railways, the Chiltern Line between Birmingham and London Marylebone passes through the District. Although there are no stations on this section, Warwick Parkway, Leamington Spa and Banbury stations are relatively accessible. The only other railway in the District is the one that runs between Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon, known as the 'Shakespeare Line'. This line provides an important service to shoppers, tourists and students and has considerable scope for improvement. The Cotswolds Line to London Paddington runs close to the southern edge of the District, with a station at Moreton-in-Marsh.

Around 5.5 million people visit the District each year, with Stratford-upon-Avon and the Shakespeare properties being of international significance. Tourism is crucial to the local economy and is facing important challenges at the present time.

A significant factor is the higher average age of the District's population compared with the national average. Almost 50% of residents are over 45 and the proportion aged 85+ has increased by nearly half over the last ten years. This trend is likely to continue.

Property prices are extremely high and many people, especially the young and lower paid, cannot afford to live within or move into the District. This makes the provision of affordable housing a priority. The latest assessment indicates that the average cost of residential property in this District is about £272,000, 24% above the national average. Compounding this situation is the ratio between house prices and earnings. Comparing the lower quartile house prices with lower quartile earnings (a standard measure of affordability) shows that, in 2007, Stratford District experienced a ratio of 9.0, well above the England average of 7.3.

The District has experienced a considerable influx of migrant workers in recent years, particularly from Eastern Europe, providing an important source for filling low paid jobs in the tourism and horticulture sectors. While they have created an additional pressure on the private housing stock, this is not the case in relation to housing association properties.

Unemployment levels fell consistently throughout the mid and late nineties although reduction has levelled off since 2001. In June 2008, the unemployment rate in Stratford District was only 1.0%, compared with 3.0% in the West Midlands region and 2.2% in the UK as a whole.

There is a considerable imbalance between the number of jobs in the District and its working population. This is a primary factor behind commuting patterns. Stratford District has experienced a higher increase of in-commuting than other parts of Warwickshire, rising from about 20% in 1981 to nearly 36% in 2001. In common with all parts of the county, there has also been an increase in out-commuting during the same period, from about 32% to just on 40%, again the highest in the county.

All this means that the District cannot be treated and planned in isolation; we have to understand and respond to such influences.

A key facet of the Local Development Framework is that it should dovetail with the District Community Plan and the Council's own Corporate Strategy. The LDF should provide a means of achieving the intentions of each.

The Community Plan has been prepared by the District Council and a range of agencies in the public and voluntary sectors and covers the period up to 2015. It identifies the aspirations, needs and priorities of the local community, and helps co-ordinate the actions of the Council and its partners.

The **Community Plan** sets the overall vision for Stratford District:

'To maintain and enhance the heritage and green environment while building healthy, safe, informed and active communities enjoying local services and employment opportunities'

Seven priority areas are identified for which specific attention should be given to achieve this vision:

- improving confidence and public safety
- a healthy environment
- supporting communities
- supporting individuals
- lifelong learning
- economy and employment
- leisure and culture.

The approach taken will be to ensure that each aspect of the Community Plan is reflected in the Core Strategy to the extent that planning policies can have a bearing on its implementation and success. The objectives and policies put forward in this document embrace each of the priority areas in some way.

A new Corporate Strategy has recently been adopted by the District Council to focus its priorities and activities for 2008-2012. Four aims are identified, together with a range of outcomes related to each of them:

Aim 1 A District where everyone shares an improved quality of life

- residents feel able to influence Council decisions
- residents have easier access to local public services
- more housing is available at a price local people can afford
- more people enjoy healthier lifestyles
- fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is reduced

Aim 2 A District that is clean and green

- reduce the risk of flooding
- a high quality environment
- increased recycling and less waste sent to landfill
- reduction in the Council's carbon footprint

Aim 3 A District where business and enterprise can flourish

- increased economic vitality of the four main market towns
- expanding local businesses are able to remain in the District
- increased value of the visitor economy across the whole District
- improve the skills of the working population

Aim 4 An excellent Council that is well managed and respected by the community

- a higher proportion of residents recognise the Council provides value for money services
- the Council's reputation with local people is improved

A Well-Being Strategy has been produced for the District. It is based on the Local Futures Group assessment of well-being in Britain in its 'State of the Nation 2006' report. In this, Stratford-on-Avon District is in 11th position overall in the national figures and is top of the table for the West Midlands.

The Group analysed the state of well-being as a target for the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan and local authority regeneration and community strategies up and down the country. The Group assessed well-being from the following perspectives:

- economic – including productivity, industrial structure, enterprise, and skills and qualifications
- social – including prosperity and wealth, deprivation and inequality, health and crime
- environmental – including housing affordability, sustainable travel and 'the best of all possible worlds – city-country life'.

Whilst the District achieved an overall good performance in all three categories, action still needs to be undertaken to ensure that the well-being of the District is maintained. Particular issues identified in the report that require specific attention include the following:

- affordability of housing
- accessibility of services
- transport/communications
- economic performance
- skills and qualifications
- occupational profile.

A set of **Market Town Visions** has been prepared covering Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam and Stratford-upon-Avon. They are based on extensive public involvement and research, including health checks. They each identify where the communities wish to be in 2020 and focus on a wide range of challenges, such as the need to strengthen the local economy and visitor offer, improve transport and other facilities, provide for the needs of all residents and protect the environment.

More information on these visions can be found on the District Council's website.

Likewise, **Town and Parish Plans** have been produced by many other communities across the District to establish their current and future needs. The plans produced for the other larger rural centres reflect a specific wish for their role to be maintained by protecting their shops and services, while safeguarding their character from excessive development. A number of common threads come through all the plans: meeting housing needs, improving road safety, preserving settlement and landscape quality, protecting services and providing job opportunities.

The LDF will help to meet the ambitions of all our communities.

Research and evidence

The Core Strategy must be founded on an accurate and thorough evidence base. This should show a clear understanding of the needs of our District and the opportunities and constraints that may influence future development and actions.

A number of studies have been carried out by or on behalf of the District Council to assist the analysis of options and devise the most appropriate way forward:

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment – all the Warwickshire local authorities, together with Coventry City and Solihull Borough Councils, commissioned Halcrow to produce a Level 1 SFRA in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 25. The study was published in January 2008. The purpose of the SFRA is to assess and map all forms of flood risk from groundwater, surface water, sewer and river sources and use this to help locate development primarily in low flood risk areas.

Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire – the research was carried out by Outside Research & Development and the report was published in August 2006. It provides up-to-date information on housing market conditions and housing needs in the District. It quantifies the extent of unmet local housing need by utilising a Housing Needs Assessment model.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - Baker Associates, in association with Enderby Associates, were appointed by the Council to undertake this study. It provides information on the extent of potential opportunities in the District to meet strategic housing needs up to 2026. The Study was published in February 2008 and is currently being updated.

Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Sub-Regional Employment Land Study - This study was commissioned by all councils in the sub-region. It was produced by DTZ and published in June 2007. The purpose of the study is to review the supply of and demand for employment land and premises. It provides a basis for assessing the amount of employment land that needs to be identified.

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment - This assessment was prepared by Rupert Scott and published in March 2008. It provides information on the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers as a basis for sub-regional and district level planning policy.

Retail Study – This was produced by Colliers CRE in June 2008 and provides evidence and advice on the provision of additional convenience goods retail floorspace given current national and regional policy and in the light of demographic and economic trends. The focus of the Study is on Stratford-upon-Avon and the rural market towns of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam.

Open Space Audit – The District Council carried out an audit covering Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres in 2005. It is based on the typology of open spaces identified in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 and definitions used by the National Playing Fields Association. The audit covers greenspaces in public and private ownership used for either active or passive recreational purposes.

In addition to these, various policy documents are relevant to the Core Strategy, including the District Council's Housing Strategy, Warwickshire County Council's Local Transport Plan and Warwickshire Primary Care Trust's Health Strategy.

There is also a considerable amount of technical data and material that underpins the preparation of the Core Strategy. This is available from the District Council. Some of this material can be viewed on the Council's website www.stratford.gov.uk.⁵

B. The Spatial Strategy

The appearance of Stratford District and the way it functions today is a result of innumerable influences and trends that have had a bearing on decisions taken by individual families, companies, public agencies, landowners and communities over the years.

While some of the changes the District has experienced in recent decades are regrettable, such as the loss of local shops and services, the indistinct design of much modern development and a decline in landscape quality.

But we should not lose sight of the benefits that local planning policies have had in controlling the location of development, ensuring that the necessary improvements to infrastructure and services have been provided by developers, in protecting our important natural and built heritage, and helping to meet the needs of communities.

What we must endeavour to do is retain what is good about our District and resist what would be harmful, while meeting the needs of people and businesses.

At the heart of the strategy should be the achievement of sustainable communities. A definition of what constitutes a sustainable community was agreed by the Government in what is known as the 'Bristol Accord'.⁶ It comprises the following features characteristics:

- Active, inclusive and safe – fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities
- Well run – with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership
- Well connected – with good transport services and communication linking people with jobs, schools, health and other services
- Environmentally sensitive – providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment
- Thriving – with a flourishing, diverse and innovative local economy
- Well designed and built – featuring high quality built and natural environment
- Fair for everyone – including those in other communities now and in the future.

⁵ See Planning Policy page, in particular under LDF Evidence Base and Development Monitoring

⁶ Bristol Accord – UK Presidency EU Ministerial Informal on Sustainable Communities (2005)

In defining these characteristics, the Government accepted that sustainable communities are diverse and that there is no standard template to fit them all. Nor is it likely that all communities will score highly on all of them.

Furthermore, the District Council believes that rural communities are just as likely to score highly on most of the characteristics as urban ones. We support the Commission for Rural Communities in its statement that:

'Our challenge is to chart a course by which rural communities, equally with urban communities, can become more sustainable in the future.'

The future spatial vision for Stratford-on-Avon District will be consistent with that which is established by the Sustainable Community Strategy. Preparation of this Strategy has recently started. It will emerge from a process of engagement with partner agencies, residents, businesses and others who have an interest in the future well-being of the District.

For now, we are basing our work on the Core Strategy on the vision set in the current Community Plan. To this we have added the four Market Town Visions and the general thrust of the various Parish Plans that have been produced by communities across the District. Together these provide a picture of what we hope Stratford District will be like in 2026 and beyond.

Our Vision of 2026

We will have maintained and enhanced the heritage and green environment while building healthy, safe, informed and active communities enjoying local services and employment opportunities.

For Stratford-upon-Avon, we will work together to achieve a vibrant, world-class town that meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors alike. We will aim to achieve World Heritage status for the town as formal recognition throughout the world, of the importance of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Alcester will be a confident, distinctive and sustainable market town supporting its surrounding communities. It will both keep its essential character and welcome the changes that are needed to make it an outstanding place to live and work.

The people of the Stour area will enjoy an excellent quality of life, having ready access to a range of local services and facilities. Shipston-on-Stour will be a vibrant market town at the focus of a rural area characterised by employment and housing opportunities for local people.

The distinctive character of Southam and its rural hinterland will have been retained, focusing upon a thriving and cohesive market town. Its built heritage and attractive environment will have been enhanced further, alongside key developments to ensure the availability of jobs, homes, learning and leisure opportunities.

The other larger rural settlements in the District will have retained their important role as service centres by providing a wide range of shops, facilities and jobs for their own residents and nearby communities. Each one will have retained its distinctive qualities and be an attractive place to live and visit.

Our smaller rural settlements will have preserved their individual character, while providing homes to meet the needs of local people. A diverse range of job opportunities will be available and local services will have been retained and, wherever possible, improved.

It is essential that the Core Strategy strives to achieve the aspirations of residents, communities and businesses established in the Community Plan and the Council's own Corporate Strategy. Based on these and well-established purposes of the planning system, we have sought to encapsulate the future needs of the District in a set of key objectives. These are expressed below (in no particular order of priority) and it is intended that they will underpin the Local Development Framework as a whole, including the policies in the Core Strategy.

Core Objectives

1. **Future housing and employment development will take place in a manner that sustains existing communities and businesses without harming the inherent character of the District or unduly increasing the need to travel by private car.**
2. **The scale and nature of housing and employment development in the smaller rural settlements will reflect their individual local needs.**
3. **Housing provision is geared to meeting the needs of the District's residents, in a manner which is responsive to changing household circumstances and attends to the specialist requirements of older people and those who are vulnerable.**
4. **Employment provision will focus on supporting existing businesses and diversifying the rural economy, together with a specific emphasis on attracting technology and knowledge-based jobs into the District.**
5. **All forms of development are required to incorporate the necessary improvements to infrastructure (including green infrastructure) and services and not make the situation worse for existing communities.**
6. **All forms of development are required to minimise negative environmental impacts and make a positive contribution to enhancing the environment, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, flood risk, biodiversity, landscape and air quality.**
7. **The location and design of development will use finite resources efficiently, be of high quality, reflect the character of the local area and be accessible and safe.**
8. **The commercial centre of Stratford-upon-Avon is enhanced through a wide range of environmental and regeneration projects.**
9. **The role of the larger rural towns and villages as service centres is bolstered, including through improved links to and from surrounding communities by public transport.**
10. **Communities are served by a wide range of health, education and leisure facilities that will meet their needs in an accessible and effective manner.**
11. **Important natural and historic features are protected and enhanced through careful management and control of development.**
12. **The character of the countryside, together with the setting of settlements within it, is protected for its own sake and for the enjoyment of everyone.**
13. **Tourism activities are promoted across the whole District, in order to spread their benefits over a wider area and to manage their impacts, particularly on Stratford-upon-Avon.**

Distinct areas of the District

In considering the future of the District it is important to establish the distinct functions that its different parts perform now and should have in the future.

We believe there is a clear and well-established arrangement to the way in which the District is perceived and works:

- Stratford-upon-Avon as the main town, which provides a wide range of shops, services and jobs for its own population and quite a large rural area around it, as well as its national and international role as a tourist attraction.
- A number of smaller rural towns and large villages, each providing a good range of shops and facilities for a more localised area.
- An extensive swathe of open countryside within which numerable villages, hamlets, farms and other activities sit.

There is no obvious reason why this existing pattern should be called into question to the extent that an entirely different approach should be taken. The District Council therefore proposes to use it as the basis for the Spatial Strategy.

These three distinct physical and functional components of our District are described in more detail below. This reflects the existing situation and also highlights a number of important considerations in planning for the future.

Stratford-upon-Avon

The RSS Phase Two Draft Revision shows the town as a 'large settlement' but not one for significant development.⁷ It envisages some new housing development within and adjacent to the urban area, together with opportunities for employment in a balanced manner.

The District Council accepts this role for the town, being by far the largest settlement in the District. But we do have concerns about its capacity to take further large-scale development due to the pressures on existing infrastructure and services and threats to its historic character.

The emerging RSS Revision also identifies the town as a strategic centre for significant retail and office development within the town centre itself. It is the only town in the District defined as such, reflecting the established role it plays in providing an extensive range of shops, services and jobs to its own residents and a wide area.

The Urban Design Framework, produced as part of the World Class Stratford initiative, promotes various environmental improvements and regeneration opportunities. The provisions of the UDF are consistent with national and regional planning policy and can be taken forward by the Core Strategy.

The UDF earmarks certain parts of the town as being suitable for major redevelopment and enhancement initiatives, including the Bridgeway/Bridgefoot area, the Rother Triangle and Market (now known as the Rother Quarter), and the Western Road/Wharf Road area (referred to as the Canal Quarter).

Tourism is vital to the economy of the town and supports a wide range of jobs, shops and facilities. Conversely, the large numbers of visitors place great pressure on the fabric of the town. We will look to manage visitors more effectively so that their experience is enhanced and their impact is reduced. This will be sought by encouraging people to stay longer, spend more and visit again. A wider range of hotels and attractions and an improved town centre environment will be essential in order to achieve this.

Transport is a key to the way the town functions and the impression it gives. We need to reduce the impact of vehicles within and around the edge of the town centre and improve facilities for walking, cycling and public transport so that they become more attractive. It is envisaged that a second park-and-ride facility will be provided on the south side of town. The Local Transport Plan produced by the County Council deals with these matters in more detail.

Larger rural settlements

The RSS Draft Revision stresses the key role that market towns have in helping to regenerate rural areas through sustainable economic and housing development and by providing local services. It goes on to emphasise the importance of retaining and enhancing the distinctive character of each individual settlement.

Stratford District covers an extensive geographical area and the distance to Stratford-upon-Avon and other larger towns in neighbouring areas can be considerable. Consequently, we believe it is vital to continue to support the role of our rural market towns and equivalent centres in providing local and accessible shops, facilities and jobs.

But it is important to acknowledge that each is different in terms of size, location, accessibility and character. As such, they each need a specific approach that respects their individual circumstances, the opportunities they present and the constraints to further development. What is critical is that the current level of service provision is maintained through support from the various public sector agencies, such as education and health, and by the planning system seeking to resist the loss of shops and services.

To complement this, it is important that the quality of the environment is improved, particularly in their commercial cores. This includes the management of traffic, provision of sufficient car parking and a high quality public realm. Each of the larger rural centres and their surrounding areas have various attractions to offer visitors; Roman Alcester, the Royal Leamington Spa Polo Grounds outside Southam, the Edgehill Civil War Battlefield near Kineton and various National Trust properties. Opportunities should be taken to draw visitors to use the shops and facilities they provide to help make them more viable.

The current District Local Plan identifies eight rural towns and large villages as Main Rural Centres. These are Alcester, Bidford-on-Avon, Henley-in-Arden, Kineton, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam, Studley and Wellesbourne.

We believe the status of Main Rural Centres is a beneficial one in that it should help to protect existing services and possibly attract new ones. While some development is likely, this will be dependent on the suitability of land and necessary improvements to infrastructure being made.

⁷ See diagram on page 48 of Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option (December 2007)

Countryside including smaller settlements

The greatest part of Stratford District is open countryside with a wide range of villages and hamlets set within it. The landscape is attractive without being dramatic; its general character is one of rolling lowland countryside, much of it arable farmland.

A closer look, however, reveals a character that is far from uniform. The underlying geological features and the impact of several thousand years of people living and working on the land have created a landscape of subtle variations: from the more wooded northern parts of the District that formed part of the ancient Forest of Arden, to the open grazing fields and floodplain of the Avon and Stour valleys; across the cleared agricultural landscape of the Feldon, to the striking Cotswold scarp and elevated area of Ironstone Uplands that run along its southern and eastern flanks.

These distinctive areas of landscape have a direct bearing on the nature of trees and hedgerows, the shape and size of fields and the way they are managed, the pattern of roads and settlements and the local building materials that were used historically.

Decisions taken by landowners, particularly farmers, on how their land is managed have a major bearing on the quality of the landscape, although much of this process lies outside the planning system. But many forms of development in the countryside do need planning permission and the District Council will look to make sure that it respects the overall quality and important features of the countryside.

It is appreciated that the communities situated within the countryside have their own needs for the future. As such, it would be unreasonable to prevent them satisfying those needs through the provision of new homes, jobs and services. The current District Local Plan has a policy on 'local choice' whereby rural communities are able to identify their needs and schemes can come forward that are specifically geared to meeting them.

The District Council believes this approach should be continued and, if anything, extended. We and our partners could become more proactive in ensuring that the needs of communities are met in order to sustain them socially and economically in the long term.

With the restructuring and loss of jobs in farming and other traditional rural industries, it is important that new job opportunities are provided. There are concerns that attracting companies to relocate to rural areas can create unsustainable patterns of movement. But there are tangible benefits to be gained through more jobs being provided in villages. Local people would not have so far to travel, they help to widen choice and diversify the rural economy, and businesses can support local services.

Village shops, pubs, schools and other facilities are the lifeblood of rural communities. The District Council will endeavour to support them and resist their closure through its planning policies. We will also look to encourage the delivery of education and training opportunities at the local level.

It is also important to maintain a network of public transport and community transport services so that people living in villages, particularly those without access to a car, can get to facilities in larger centres. We will focus our attention on improving links to the larger rural centres nearby in order to bolster their role.

The countryside provides a wide range of opportunities for active and informal leisure and recreation uses, ranging from golf courses and equestrian activities to the extensive network of public footpaths. We will support the provision of new attractions that are sensitive to the character of the landscape and communities and provide benefits to the rural economy.

The main aspects of the Spatial Strategy for the District are illustrated on the **Key Diagram**.

Overall Development Strategy

National and regional context

The Government's overarching objective is to achieve sustainable patterns of development through the planning system. This includes promoting urban and rural regeneration to improve the well being of all communities and meeting their diverse needs. Sufficient land should be made available for housing and business development, taking into account issues such as access to a wide range of facilities, the provision of essential infrastructure and scope to reduce the need to travel.

The Regional Spatial Strategy sets out the overall approach to the location of development. Both the current RSS and the emerging Revision support the principle of some housing and employment development in the larger settlements in Stratford District. Small-scale development in villages is intended to be limited to meeting local housing requirements and help to support local services. This strategy should be followed unless there are overriding local circumstances for not doing so.

The situation with the RSS Revision has taken a further turn with the publication of a study commissioned by the Government Office to consider the housing requirement proposed in the Draft Phase Two Preferred Options document. The report produced by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners⁸ does not represent the formal position of Government but it will be used in its evidence to the Examination in Public into the RSS Phase Two Revision.

The main finding of the study in relation to Stratford-on-Avon District is that it is capable of taking an additional 4,500 dwellings between 2006-2026 under all three potential scenarios identified. The study envisages this additional development taking the form of an eco-town or an alternative new settlement in a different location.

The District Council has not sought to respond to this situation in the Draft Core Strategy. We will consider the matter thoroughly in preparing for the next stage in its production.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

Neither of these documents deals with the specific issue of where development should take place in the future. However, they do cover a wide range of matters which are affected by the way in which settlements are treated in planning policy terms, including access to services and facilities, support for the local economy and the manner in which housing needs are met. They also seek to support communities across the District so that everyone can share in an improved quality of life.

Current situation

The function and role of our various towns and villages has become well-established over the years. Back in time this was due to such factors as physical location and the granting of market charters. In modern times, some settlements have been specifically identified to take significant development and be the focus of improved services.

In large measure, the present situation reflects the reality of service delivery by the public sector, the economic viability of shops and facilities provided by the private sector and the relationship of settlements to each other.

To give an indication of how much development has taken place in the District in recent years, the overall number of dwellings has increased by some 38% since 1981. Much of this has been concentrated in the larger settlements, with Stratford-upon-Avon seeing an increase in dwellings of 52%, while Wellesbourne has grown by 73%, Bidford by 84% and Shipston by 95%.

Although this seems excessive and harmful, it is important to recognise that focusing development on larger settlements has helped to sustain and improve a wide range of services and jobs within them. A more limited amount of development in the District or a more concentrated or dispersed distribution of new dwellings may well have undermined the role of our rural centres particularly.

In terms of the local economy and employment opportunities, Stratford-upon-Avon supports the greatest number of jobs; around 30% of the 63,400 jobs that currently exist. Having said that, many of the larger rural towns and villages provide a wide range of job opportunities, with Alcester, Bidford, Southam and Wellesbourne in particular having substantial industrial estates.

The past ten years or so have seen a further 86 hectares of land developed for industrial uses⁹. This has been distributed widely across the District, including three new business parks on the edge of Stratford-upon-Avon and a significant expansion of manufacturing and distribution activities at Wellesbourne. However, nearly one-third of the increase has been at Gaydon Proving Ground associated with the research, development and production of motor vehicles.

⁸ Development of Options for the West Midlands RSS in response to National Housing and Planning Advice Unit Report (October 2008)

⁹ Class B uses only as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order

Consultation

At the Issues & Options consultation stage, we presented a range of alternative approaches as to where new housing, jobs and services should be provided in the future. These were:

1. Concentrate development in and on the edge of Stratford-upon-Avon
2. Concentrate development in and on the edge of the larger rural towns and villages
3. Spread development around most towns and villages throughout the District
4. Focus development in the form of a new settlement or as a major expansion of an existing settlement
5. Locate development along main public transport routes (existing or potential)
6. Focus development on large brownfield (previously developed) sites in the countryside.

There was a clear preference expressed for a wide dispersal of future housing development across most settlements in the District, with 41% of respondents giving this option as their first choice. The situation was less clear-cut for employment development, with a concentration on the larger settlements in the District gaining similar support to a more dispersed approach.

Sustainability Appraisal

Each of the six options for locating future development has been assessed against the wide range of factors identified in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.¹⁰

No other discrete, reasonable option was put forward at the Issues & Options stage that merits further consideration.

The assessment is set out in **Appendix A** at the back of this document. It also forms part of the Sustainability Appraisal itself, published as a companion to this document. Its broad conclusions in relation to each option are:

1. The most polarised option. Overall it is the most sustainable but raises serious concerns over impact on the town's character and assets. Option 3 would involve some development related to the town in any case.
2. Portrays neither significant strengths nor weaknesses. Option 3 would involve some development related to larger rural settlements in any case.
3. Favoured option based on the consultation process but least scope to reduce use of the private car. Provides scope to meet needs where they arise and to support those who are disadvantaged. If this approach is chosen as the Preferred Option, consideration should be given to focusing on settlements that can support local facilities (existing or potential) and/or have good access, preferably by modes other than the private car, to nearby settlements that have such facilities.
4. Little support expressed for this option through the consultation process. It would not appear to be appropriate given the character, needs and circumstances faced by Stratford District. No clear strategic housing role has been identified for such an approach.
5. Provides opportunity to locate development where it can reduce reliance on the private car. May not be a viable option in its own right but could form a component of the Preferred Option.
6. Raises major concerns over whether such sites are in appropriate locations to achieve other important objectives. The identification of a specific rural brownfield site for development would need to be consistent with the Preferred Option or be fully justified based on its individual circumstances.

Justification for Preferred Option

The dispersal of development across the whole District, with the prospect of some development in most towns and villages (Option 3), is favoured by the District Council at this stage. However, the manner in which this approach is put into effect should reflect and be sensitive to the specific circumstances of each settlement.

In particular, the District Council believes it is appropriate to focus on the role of the larger rural settlements as a way of ensuring the effective provision of public services and commercial facilities. While we do not want those limited facilities that remain in villages to decline further, it is important to ensure that a wide range of provision is maintained in larger centres that are relatively close at hand and accessible.

We also feel that scope should be given for smaller communities to meet their own needs in order to help sustain their future. To assist this process, it may be necessary for the District Council to become more pro-active in working with communities to help meet their needs, including 'local choice' housing schemes. However, it will be important to make sure that the scale of development in these locations, both individually and cumulatively, does not undermine other aspects of the strategy.

¹⁰ Sustainability Appraisal of Development Plan Documents Scoping Report, Stratford-on-Avon District Council, (March 2007)

Reasons for rejecting other options

- Option 1: Concentrating a considerable amount of development in Stratford-upon-Avon would be harmful to the character and setting of the town. There are also significant infrastructure constraints that would have to be overcome to the satisfaction of various agencies.
- Option 2: Concentrating development on larger rural settlements would also be harmful to their character. There is insufficient capacity for achieving the required scale of development in these settlements in a satisfactory manner.
- Option 4: The new settlement option was the least favoured option. This approach would not be consistent with meeting local needs where they arise. It is likely to come into the reckoning only if the housing requirement for Stratford District is increased significantly to the extent that the scale of growth could not be met satisfactorily in existing settlements.
- Option 5: There are insufficient, high quality public transport routes across the District to make this a viable approach in itself. The preferred option provides some scope to improve the linkages between villages and the larger settlements in the District.
- Option 6: Raises major concerns over whether such sites are in appropriate locations to achieve other important objectives. They tend to be some distance from existing services and facilities, would be heavily dependent on car-borne transport and not meet the needs of people and businesses in an effective manner.

Policy CS.1

For the purposes of promoting and regulating development, and also to reflect the wider function of settlements in the District, the following hierarchy is applied:

1. Main Town: Stratford-upon-Avon

Housing and employment development will take place at the specific locations identified in the Core Strategy and through small-scale schemes on suitable sites within or adjacent to the built form of the town.

Large-scale retail, office and leisure development should take place within or adjacent to the town centre. Such proposals elsewhere in or on the edge of the urban area will require thorough assessment to make sure that a more appropriate site is not available and that no harm would be caused to the role of the town centre.

2. Main Rural Centres:

**Alcester
Bidford-on-Avon
Henley-in-Arden
Kineton
Shipston-on-Stour
Southam
Studley
Wellesbourne**

Housing and employment development will take place at the specific locations identified in the Core Strategy and through small-scale schemes on suitable sites within or adjacent to the built form of each settlement, excluding land within the Green Belt.

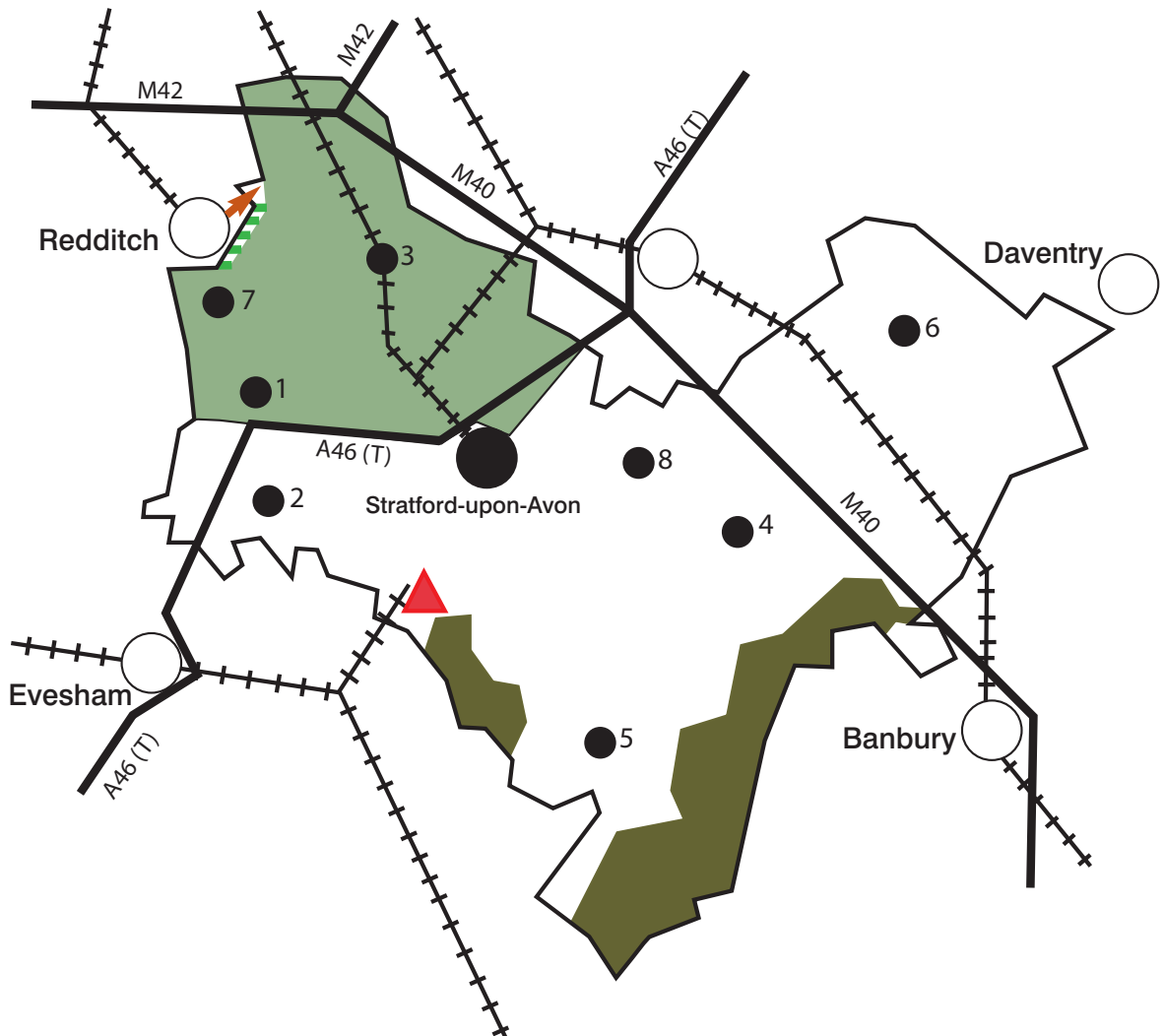
The role of these settlements as service centres is supported through the provision of improved shopping and community facilities to meet the day-to-day needs of local people.

3. All other settlements

Small-scale community-led schemes which meet a housing or employment need identified by a local community are encouraged in accordance with Policy CS.2.

The provision of new or improved local facilities is supported.

Key Diagram



● Main Town
Stratford-upon-Avon

- Main Rural Centres
- 1 Alcester
 - 2 Bidford-on-Avon
 - 3 Henley-in-Arden
 - 4 Kington
 - 5 Shipston-on-Stour
 - 6 Southam
 - 7 Studley
 - 8 Wellesbourne

▲ Possible Eco-town

➤ Proposed direction of
Redditch expansion

■ Green Belt

■ Proposed extension of
Green Belt

■ Cotswolds Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty

— Motorways and Trunk Roads

⊢⊢⊢ Railways



NORTH

Not to Scale

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Theme 1: Managing the amount and location of development

Stratford District has consistently come under great pressure for development over recent decades due to its proximity to London and the South-East. The construction of the M40 increased this pressure from people seeking to move to the area. It is particularly important that the needs of our existing residents for homes, jobs and services are met. On the other hand, it is essential that we protect all that is best in the District; its landscape, natural features and historic heritage.

Regional and local planning policies must continue to achieve an appropriate balance between these often competing, but not necessarily incompatible claims.

How much development should there be?

The Regional Spatial Strategy Revision will establish the scale of housing and employment development that should be provided in Stratford District between 2006 and 2026.

There are at the present time, however, a number of major uncertainties about the eventual outcome of this revision process:

- The Government has requested that the housing requirement for the region be reassessed in the light of higher household projections and its objective of providing more homes across the country.
- There is a specific issue about the expansion of Redditch and the possibility that land adjacent to Redditch, but within Stratford and/or Bromsgrove Districts, will be required to meet the future housing and employment needs of the town.¹¹
- A bid for an Eco-town on the former Ministry of Defence depot at Long Marston has been made in response to a Government invitation. The proposal, known as Middle Quinton, comprises around 6,000 dwellings.

Housing

Stratford District is an attractive area for people to want to live but also very expensive. As a result there is a high level of demand for private homes to buy and rent and a need for more affordable homes to be provided.

The current Regional Spatial Strategy looks to concentrate new housing development in the main conurbations in order to help their regeneration and to reduce the level of out-migration into rural areas. This approach has been successful and has been carried forward into the RSS Phase Two Draft Revision whereby future housing development in Stratford District is to meet the needs of the area in a sustainable manner.

The emerging Revision, unlike the existing RSS, includes district level housing requirements.¹² As things stand the requirement for Stratford District is to provide 5,600 dwellings (net) over the period 2006-2026, which equates to an annual average requirement of 280 dwellings per annum. This is a substantial reduction in the rates that were previously required through the Structure Plan (550 dwellings) and is significantly lower than the actual completion rates that have been achieved in recent years (545 dwellings per annum since 2001).

The following table illustrates the various sources of housing that contribute to meeting the dwelling requirement set in the Draft RSS Phase Two Revision.

¹¹ Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option, Policy CF3 Table 1 (December 2007)

¹² Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option, Policy CF3 Table 1 (December 2007)

Housing Land Supply Assessment for Stratford District (as at 31.03.08)

1	Housing target 2006-2026 in RSS Phase Two Revision Preferred Option (excluding the needs of Redditch)	5,600
2	Dwellings completed by 31.03.08	848
3	Dwellings under construction at 31.03.08	371*
4	Dwellings permitted but not started at 31.03.08	782*
5	Windfall allowance (for period 2021-2026 only)	750
6	Proposed Development Locations identified in Draft Core Strategy	2,550
7	Sites identified in SHLAA (not otherwise included above)	455**
8	Total provision	5,756
<p>* includes only those sites where implementation is likely by 2026 ** 15% discount applied to take account of non-implementation All figures are given as net dwellings Table on page 71 of this document itemises those sites in row 4 that comprise 10 or more dwellings and all the sites in row 7</p>		

However, the housing situation is in a state of flux at the present time. The Government is not satisfied that the overall requirement for the region set out in the RSS Draft Revision provides sufficiently for the forecast demand or need for new homes and has asked that the figures be reconsidered and increased accordingly across the region as a whole.

The recently published study by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners proposes an increase of 4,500 dwellings for Stratford District to reflect what it describes as significant affordability issues, under supply against national housing projections and capacity within the market.

The position taken in this document is to show how the current housing requirement in the Draft RSS Revision can be met in an appropriate and achievable manner. The District Council believes this is a sound approach that will remain valid and appropriate to meet the scale of the housing requirement as currently stated; even if it is subsequently increased through the RSS process.

It is emphasised that the scale of future housing development is not just to do with the number of new homes provided but also how effectively they are targeted to meet local needs. This has to take into account factors such as location, tenure, type/size and occupancy.

Employment

Within the overall objective in the Regional Spatial Strategy of improving the economic performance of the West Midlands, the intention is to provide for the employment needs of Stratford District in a sustainable way. There is a particular focus on diversifying the local economy and providing for a scale of development that is required to meet local needs.

The importance of meeting the needs of businesses and of providing jobs for our residents is essential to the well-being of the District. Clearly, jobs are provided by a wide range of sectors in the local economy including public services, retail, tourism and agriculture, as well as by office, industrial and warehouse-based companies. These last three categories are covered by Class B of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order.

The Regional Spatial Strategy Draft Revision sets a specific quantity of land that should be provided in the District for Class B uses. The overall requirement for the period 2006-2021 is 51 hectares, and it is expected that 17 hectares should be readily available during any five-year period, known as a 'reservoir'.¹³

This equates to an annual rate of 3.4 hectares being developed for Class B uses. By comparison, about 4.5 hectares per annum has been implemented during the period 1996-2008.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this figure is still higher than that which would be required to meet the local labour demand, according to the Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Sub-Region Employment Land Study. On that basis, the study concluded that only 1.5 hectares per annum would be needed during the period 2006-2016.¹⁵ However, the District Council does not wish to unduly restrict the creation of new job opportunities and is supportive of the higher rate of development proposed in the emerging RSS.

The table below assesses the overall amount of land currently provided for Class B employment development. It shows that there are just over 20 hectares available, including sites under construction, that have a reasonable prospect of being developed during the period 2008-13, ie. the current five year reservoir.

On the face of it, a further 17 hectares should be made available to meet the needs of the 2013-2018 period and a similar amount again for the subsequent five years. The proposed development opportunities identified in the Core Strategy are intended to help meet the RSS Revision employment land requirement for the District up to 2021, as well as respond to the needs of individual parts of the District for business and employment growth.

As with the Draft RSS Revision, due to the difficulties in forecasting accurately the longer term employment land requirements of the local economy, we have not sought to provide for the post 2021 period. This will be considered through a review of the Core Strategy.

Employment Land Supply Assessment for Stratford District (in hectares) (as at 31.03.08)

1	Indicative employment land requirement 2006-2021 in RSS Phase Two Revision Preferred Option	51.0
2	Completed 2006-2008	9.8
3	Under construction at 1 April 2008	2.6
4	With planning permission or otherwise committed and likely to be implemented during period 2008-2013	17.8
5	With planning permission or otherwise committed but may not be implemented	13.0
6	Large scale schemes with planning permission at Gaydon Proving Ground	14.0
7	Estimate of land developed for Class B uses on Proposed Development Opportunities identified in Draft Core Strategy	27.0
8	Total provision	84.2

Notes:

- Employment land defined as falling within Use Classes B1, B2 and B8
- Employment element of mixed-use sites is estimated until a detailed scheme is approved
- Minimum size of site included in assessment is 0.4 hectares
- Row 7 excludes land identified at Winyates Green Triangle to meet the needs of Redditch

The RSS Draft Revision looks to concentrate further office development (within Class A2 and B1a of the Use Classes Order) in town and city centres rather than on business parks or other locations. It specifies that about 20,000 square metres of office floorspace should be provided within or on the edge of Stratford-upon-Avon town centre between now and 2026.¹⁶ Particular attention will need to be given to this matter in the approach taken towards future development opportunities in the town.

Where should development take place?

The assessment of development options carried out by the District Council clearly establishes that a dispersed approach towards new housing, employment and tourism development is appropriate and preferable, with a particular focus on Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres.

¹³ West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option, Table 4 (December 2007)

¹⁴ this excludes large-scale development at Gaydon Proving Ground which has been treated as an exception to the operation of policies dealing with employment provision to meet the needs of the District

¹⁵ see Table 6.15 – the Study uses Cambridge Econometrics data as the basis for calculating local labour demand

¹⁶ Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option, Policy PA13A (December 2007)

Taking this forward, we have considered the development potential of land in and on the edge of each settlement. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) carried out by consultants on behalf of the District Council has had an important input to identifying the scope for development.

Further analysis of the suitability and capability of developing parcels of land has been carried out by the District Council in conjunction with other bodies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, English Heritage, Highways Agency and Warwickshire County Council. We have also been discussing the merits and impacts of further development with the communities involved.

Out of this initial assessment, a wide range of locations have been identified in this document which the District Council at this stage feels are the most appropriate to meet the future housing, employment, retail and community.

A Schedule of Proposed Development Opportunities is provided at Appendix B at the back of this document. It identifies the range of uses that we feel are appropriate and an indication of the scale of development involved. A set of Proposals Maps illustrating the extent of each area of land is also provided.

From what we know about these locations, it has been possible to specify:

- improvements to infrastructure and services that are required in order to support development
- improvements to facilities that will benefit the existing community now and for the future
- measures to be incorporated to reduce the impact of development on the local area
- opportunities for enhancing certain key features as an integral part of any development scheme.

We have consulted a wide range of agencies and organisations about these locations and discussed them with representatives of the communities involved. However, more work needs to be carried out before they can be confirmed at the next stage of the Core Strategy. Comments made at this stage will have a bearing on which development locations should go forward.

It is important to appreciate that the focus of the Core Strategy is on larger parcels of land; those that have implications for achieving the overall approach to meeting the future needs of the District. Other, generally smaller sites, referred to as 'windfalls', may come forward for development within or on the edge of Stratford-upon-Avon and each of the Main Rural Centres. Such schemes tend to comprise less than 10 dwellings or less than 1000 square metres of business floorspace, although larger schemes may arise that prove to be acceptable due to site specific circumstances.

The District Council will consider the need for a separate document that will identify suitable small development sites once the Core Strategy is produced. However, we may decide that the policies set out in the Core Strategy are sufficiently robust in providing a basis for considering the merits of such sites as they come forward as planning applications.

Stratford-upon-Avon

A number of the locations earmarked for future development come out of the World Class Stratford initiative which identified a number of key opportunities for improving the character of the town through redevelopment and enhancement projects. These are set out in the Urban Design Framework¹⁷ for the town. They each provide for a wide range of uses as befits their location within or close to the town centre. The critical principle is that each one plays to its strengths rather than competes with the others for the same uses.

Three locations, the Egg Packing Station on Bishopton Lane, south of Kipling Road and west of Shottery, are designated as Strategic Reserve Sites in the current District Local Plan. The principle that development of these sites is suitable has previously been established but they have not been needed due to the amount of housing already provided for the period up to 2011. However, it is clear that they will need to be made available for development during the new plan period up to 2026.

The District Council believes that land to the west of Shottery still represents the most appropriate opportunity for large-scale development in the town, compared with the alternatives that were thoroughly assessed at the previous Local Plan Inquiry. There has been no apparent significant change of circumstances to suggest that other land on the edge of the town is now more appropriate. However, given the wide range of brownfield sites within the urban area that have the benefit of planning permission or have been identified in this document, the District Council does not anticipate this land being released for development until after 2016.

Two areas of land put forward for consideration at this stage require particular mention. Land to the south of Alcester Road is suggested for a range of employment and commercial uses; partly to offer an attractive location for businesses displaced by the redevelopment of the Western Road area and also to provide a further high quality site to attract new companies to the town.

¹⁷ Urban Design Framework Supplementary Planning Document, Stratford-on-Avon District Council (July 2007)

The other proposal relates to land to the north of Banbury Road which is being promoted specifically for an extra care/nursing care complex. Access would be through Milestone Meadow and secure a self-contained form of development that would not provide for further development to the north-east.

If the District's housing requirement is increased by only a modest amount, say by up to 500 dwellings, it will be necessary to consider the most appropriate means of locating this additional development. Such an increase is likely to be justified on the basis of responding to a higher level of demand rather than meeting local need. For this reason, and because it would be inappropriate to expect the Main Rural Centres to take a greater amount of development, the District Council believes this additional amount of housing should ideally be provided in Stratford-upon-Avon.

At this stage a preferred location for any additional housing development has not been identified. This will be dependent on a rigorous analysis of whether the town's infrastructure has the capacity to take an additional amount of development, over and above what is proposed in this document.

Main Rural Centres

A wide range of potential development locations are put forward for consideration. These are mostly on the edges of settlements since there is little scope for significant development or redevelopment within their existing physical forms.

The focus of most of the locations is on providing a wide range of housing, including affordable homes and specialist accommodation for the elderly. A number of locations also include scope for business and commercial uses. These include land at Shipston and Southam as part of a mixed-use approach, or solely additional employment opportunities, such as at Alcester, Studley and the HRI site near Wellesbourne.

It is particularly important in the larger rural settlements to consider how future development can support improvements to services and infrastructure that will also benefit the existing community. This is because one of the fundamental planks of the strategy being promoted by the District Council is to bolster the role of the larger rural settlements as foci for a wide range of community and commercial facilities.

A number of individual development opportunities identified in the Draft Core Strategy incorporate specific improvements to services. These include a replacement secondary school at Kineton, new medical facilities at Shipston-on-Stour and Wellesbourne, and improved sports clubs at Southam.

Smaller settlements

The current District Local Plan introduced a ground-breaking policy for enabling small-scale development in a range of settlements in the District. This is known as 'local choice' (see Policy COM.1). A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been produced by the District Council to explain how the policy is applied.¹⁸

Basically, this approach provides an opportunity for those communities to identify a level and type of need for homes (affordable and open market), jobs or facilities. Schemes can then be promoted that look to satisfy that need in some way.

There is also a policy in the District Local Plan (Policy CTY.5) that deals with rural 'exception' housing schemes. This supports the provision of solely affordable homes in the smaller rural settlements to meet a proven need.

Small-scale development that is supported by a rural community for specific, local reasons is likely to be founded on a positive attitude towards wanting to sustain the viability of that community for the future. This aspiration should not be stifled merely due to a poor performance against specific aspects of sustainability such as the need to travel in order to reach services and jobs.

For this reason, we propose to extend the 'local choice' approach to all rural settlements. This will hopefully provide more scope for small housing developments in any village where a need is revealed through a housing needs survey of the specific community involved.

It is not practicable to identify suitable sites for such purposes in the Core Strategy document since for most settlements the scale and nature of need yet to be identified. Furthermore, there is a multitude of potential parcels of land in and around villages that may be suitable for small-scale development to meet such needs. The assessment of suitable sites will be carried out for individual settlements as the need arises.

It is stressed that large-scale development proposals that are out-of-scale and keeping with the character of the village are inappropriate and will be resisted.

Policy CS.2

The views of the local community as expressed preferably in a Parish Plan (or equivalent), or in its absence an alternative source of reliable evidence, are fully taken into account in the planning process. In particular, they are used:

- (a) to help assess the merits of schemes promoted by communities to meet needs which they have identified**
- (b) as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and to assist in identifying the scope and nature of associated planning obligations which might be sought**
- (c) to identify opportunities for environmental and other forms of enhancement.**

Small-scale schemes which meet housing (particularly affordable housing) and employment needs identified by a local community are encouraged. Such schemes are considered against the following criteria:

- (a) the robustness of the justification made in support of the scale, location and type of housing and employment sought**
- (b) the maximisation of the use of previously-developed land which is available**
- (c) the need to ensure that the character of the area affected by the scheme and the settlement as a whole is retained.**

In the case of a housing scheme promoted to meet a local need, the tenure mix should be consistent with the overall nature of the need identified. The occupancy of all dwellings in such schemes are regulated by applying a local connection principle and also a sales procedure in the case of local market properties.

Countryside

It is Government policy that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake and in order to afford protection for non-renewable and natural resources. Accordingly, the emphasis of the Core Strategy is to support appropriate forms of development in the countryside in a manner which minimises the impact, but otherwise to apply rigorous controls.

Provision is made in the Core Strategy whereby the merits of various forms of development and activity in the countryside can be assessed. In general terms, these can either only reasonably be located in the countryside or would have an important contribution to make to the function and well-being of rural areas. They include such uses as the re-use of rural buildings, farm diversification projects and a range of recreation and leisure activities.

In all other respects, it is anticipated that development proposals have no necessity to be located in the countryside or would not bring sufficient benefits to override the general principle of restraint.

Policy CS.3

Development in the countryside is resisted, other than that which is consistent with other planning policies, in order to preserve its character and to ensure that resources are protected.

Proposals for a form of development or activity in the countryside that is not otherwise consistent has to be fully justified and show that:

- (a) it would not be contrary to the overall strategy for regulating development**
- (b) its impact on the character of the area would not be harmful**
- (c) there would be significant benefits to the local area and/or the District as a whole.**

Green Belt

A substantial part of Stratford District has been covered by formal Green Belt since 1975. It stretches from the northern edge of Stratford-upon-Avon, along the A46 westwards and the A439 eastwards up to the District boundary with Redditch, Solihull and Warwick. The settlements of Alcester, Henley and Studley are excluded from the Green Belt. The extent of the Green Belt is indicated on the Key Diagram.

There appears to be no justification for changing the existing boundary as there is sufficient, suitable land outside the Green Belt to meet the housing and employment needs of the District up to 2026.

Over the years, our Local Plans have contained a detailed policy on controlling development in the Green Belt, consistent with that set out in PPG2¹⁹. The new LDF system is not expected to merely repeat national policy since that should be fully taken into account in any case when considering development proposals.

However, it is acceptable to establish a locally-distinctive approach to controlling development in the Green Belt if it can be justified due to the particular circumstances of an area. The District Council believes it is appropriate to provide scope to meet the reasonable needs of a community whether it lies within or outside the Green Belt. For that reason, while fully supporting the presumption against inappropriate development as set out in PPG2 the District Council intends to apply the 'local choice' principle to villages that lie within the Green Belt, as set out in Policy CS.2.

This means that small-scale housing schemes for affordable and open market dwellings could be appropriate within or on the edge of a village to meet a proven local need. Likewise, the provision of new business space to provide local job opportunities may be supported.

There is no reason why such modest development should be harmful to the character or purpose of the Green Belt, although each development proposal will have to be thoroughly assessed against this factor.

Annex C of PPG2 provides guidance on the future of major developed sites in the Green Belt. Where such sites are identified in a development plan, limited infilling or redevelopment may be appropriate. The following sites are identified in the current District Local Plan and we propose to retain these in the Core Strategy:

- Bearley Mill
- Saville Tractors, Bearley
- Earlswood Trading Estate
- Arvin Meritor (Maudslay Works), Great Alne
- The Mill Industrial Park, Kings Coughton
- Troy Industrial Estate and Chestnut Farm, Jill Lane, Sambourne
- Poplars Trading Estate/Green Lane Farm, Studley.
- Renshaw Industrial Estate, Jewsons and Alleleys, Green Lane/The Slough, Studley.

It is considered that proposals for limited infilling or redevelopment for employment purposes on these sites could help to secure jobs and support the rural economy. However, they should not have any greater impact on the character or purposes of the Green Belt. Proposals will be considered against the criteria set out in Annex C of PPG2. Other uses may be appropriate but it will be necessary in all cases to ensure that strategic planning policies regarding the location of development are satisfied.

Specific guidance is also given on the scale of extensions to existing dwellings and of proposals for replacement dwellings in the Green Belt.

Policy CS.4

In addition to those specified in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2, the following specific forms of development within the Green Belt are supported in principle:

- (a) small-scale housing and employment development within or on the edge of settlements that would meet a proven local need, in accordance with Policy CS.2**
- (b) limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites for employment or other uses which would have no greater impact on the area than the existing use and which would not be contrary to the overall strategy**
- (c) the extension of an existing dwelling where it would not have a detrimental impact on the openness of the Green Belt. The same principle is applied to proposals for replacement dwellings.**

Large brownfield sites in rural areas

There are numerous small brownfield (previously developed) sites scattered throughout the rural parts of the District. Most of them have been or continue to be in various forms of industrial or commercial use. Where buildings are concerned, it is likely that their re-use for a similar purpose would be appropriate unless this would be clearly harmful to the character of the area.

There are, however, a small number of brownfield sites in the countryside that justify a specific policy approach because of their scale and potential impact. Policy GD.7 in the Warwickshire Structure Plan²⁰ dealt with such sites effectively and it is appropriate to retain this approach through our own LDF.

The basic premise of the policy is that development or redevelopment of such sites should be for uses that are not and could not be provided in those locations that are specifically identified for development in the Core Strategy. What is more, the proposed development should be for a purpose that makes a significant contribution to the economic, social and environmental health of the District or is in the wider regional or national interest.

Because such sites tend to be in locations that are some distance from existing centres of population they are often not the most sustainable in terms of access and linkages. Consequently, large-scale development has to be justified on the basis of overriding benefits in order for a proposal to be acceptable.

The current District Local Plan establishes the District Council's position on a number of these sites:

- Gaydon Proving Ground (Policy CTY.16)
- Engineer Resources Depot, Long Marston (Policy CTY.18)
- Southam Cement Works (Policy CTY.19)
- Harbury Cement Works, Bishops Itchington (Policy CTY.20)

Their respective policies set out the type of uses that would be appropriate and the specific issues that will be applied when considering development proposals relating to them. We see no reason, as things stand, for adjusting this position on any of these sites. Consequently, the existing policies in the Local Plan will continue to be applied by the District Council for the time being.

Policy CTY.18 of the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review requires that any proposals to redevelop the Long Marston site should be supported by a Masterplan prepared in consultation with local communities, neighbouring local authorities and other interested parties. The owners of the site, St. Modwen, are now working with the District Council to prepare a Masterplan for the site. The preparation of the Masterplan is viewed as a pre-cursor to the submission of a planning application which would secure the long-term use of the site.

Initial community consultation events were held in October 2007. The consultation sought views on four potential options:

- continuation of existing use
- leisure and employment
- leisure only
- linked new settlement.

A further consultation exercise has recently been carried out by St. Modwen on two, more focussed options:

- leisure-led mixed use
- residential-led mixed use.

This process is continuing independently but in parallel with the promotion of the Eco-town project for the site.

Any other large brownfield site that comes forward for redevelopment will be treated by applying the same range of principles originally established in the Structure Plan and now set out in the following policy.

²⁰ Warwickshire Structure Plan is now revoked under the provisions of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 apart from a small number of policies, including GD.7, that have been 'saved' under the transitional arrangements of the Act

Policy CS.5

The re-use of extensive areas of previously-developed land in the countryside, outside the Green Belt, is acceptable where the proposed scheme:

- (a) is for a strategically significant purpose that is in the national and/or regional interest**
- (b) includes a scale and form of development that could not reasonably be provided in a manner more consistent with the approach taken in the Core Strategy regarding the location of development**
- (c) offers sufficient advantages to the local area that override any detrimental impacts it would cause**
- (d) would not be harmful to features that have statutory protection and minimises its impact on features of local importance**
- (e) is designed to minimise the need to travel and promotes the use of transport other than the private car.**

Development with cross-boundary implications

Stratford District is faced with two significant development issues that have major implications for certain parts of its own area but also involve close working with neighbouring authorities because of their geographical location.

Redditch expansion

The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option (December 2007) sets out the current situation on this matter. Policy CF3 Level and Distribution of New Housing Development (Table 1) proposes a total of 6,600 dwellings for Redditch Borough (net) between 2006 and 2026, which includes 3,300 in Redditch Borough itself and 3,300 adjacent to Redditch town in Bromsgrove and/or Stratford-on-Avon Districts.

Policy PA6A Employment Land Provision (Table 4) allocates Redditch Borough with a rolling five year reservoir of 17ha, of which 8ha will be provided within Bromsgrove and/or Stratford and an indicative long term requirement of 51ha of which 24ha will be provided within Bromsgrove and/or Stratford.

It is anticipated that these cross boundary targets will be divided between Bromsgrove and Stratford-on-Avon Districts through the Examination in Public process of the RSS Phase Two Revision. This is because separate Core Strategies are being produced and there is no other mechanism for splitting the target. This approach is being progressed in consultation with the Government Office.

For Bromsgrove District Council and Stratford-on-Avon District Council, these requirements are to be treated as an addition to their individual development targets.

This cross boundary growth must be adjacent to Redditch town as it is required to meet Redditch's own housing and employment needs and to support its role as a sustainable Strategic Centre.

Stratford District Council is concerned to ensure that the outcome of this process does not conflict with fundamental principles relating to the role of the Green Belt, in particular the importance of retaining the separate identities of Studley and Mappleborough Green.

To inform the distribution and location of this cross boundary growth, two studies have been carried out. The first,²¹ considered the potential of the urban area of Redditch to accommodate housing and employment growth to 2026; the level of additional peripheral growth required to meet the housing and employment requirements; and the implications for accommodating the peripheral growth.

A more detailed study²² has concluded that Redditch Borough has less capacity for further development than anticipated. Accordingly, it appears to be necessary for Bromsgrove and/or Stratford-on-Avon Districts to take more than the 3,300 dwellings initially stated in the emerging RSS Revision. A figure of about 4,350 dwellings is now identified.

²¹ Joint Study into the Future Growth Implications of Redditch Town to 2026, White Young Green (December 2007)
²² Study into the Future Growth Implications of Redditch Second Stage Report, White Young Green (September 2008)

The study also indicates the preferred locations for future development to meet the future needs of Redditch. It makes the following recommendations:

- none of Redditch's housing requirement should be met in Stratford District
- land known as the Winyates Green Triangle should be identified for employment purposes
- the Green Belt should be extended westwards to include all the land between the A435 and the District boundary in the vicinity of Mappleborough Green.

Policy CS.6

In relation to land on the eastern edge of Redditch, the following provisions are made:

- (a) approximately 11.7 hectares of land at Winyates Green Triangle will be released for employment development to meet the needs of Redditch**
- (b) the Green Belt will be extended to include land between the A435 and the boundary with Redditch Borough.**

These provisions are shown on the Proposals Map.

Middle Quinton Eco-town

The owners of the former Ministry of Defence depot at Long Marston and neighbouring land are promoting an Eco-town through a process instigated by the Government. The proposal comprises about 6,000 dwellings along with services and employment. This scale of development will obviously have a major impact on a wide area, including the numerous villages in the locality and Stratford-upon-Avon town should it go ahead.

The proposal package will be expected to incorporate a wide range of facilities, including retail, education, health and leisure, to meet the everyday needs of the new community. It will also have to provide a wide range of transport infrastructure, to make sure that road-based traffic does not cause further congestion and harm within Stratford-upon-Avon but also to give residents an attractive choice of travel modes, including public transport.

It is not yet known whether, the principle of this Eco-town proposal will be supported by the Government; a final decision is now due to be made in March 2009. If it is supported, it is anticipated that a planning application will initially be submitted to the District Council for consideration and determination.

The District Council has already expressed major concerns about the Middle Quinton Eco-town in its initial consideration of the proposal:





- it cannot be regarded as compatible with the existing or emerging development plan, either at regional or local level
- it could undermine the regional and sub-regional strategies by diverting private and public investment away from areas needing regeneration
- it conflicts with the focus of growth in the sub-region specified in the RSS Revision which is the corridor between Nuneaton through Coventry to Warwick/Leamington and also Rugby
- the impact it would have on existing communities and the character of the area
- there are significant infrastructure and physical issues that would have to be resolved, including traffic and highways, public transport, facilities and services, employment, flood risk and contamination.

Besides specific concerns about its location and impact, we do not believe that a new settlement is the most appropriate approach to meeting the housing and employment needs of Stratford District. A large new settlement, such as that proposed by the promoters of Middle Quinton, would focus most of the supply of new housing, jobs and investment in one location, whereas the need for these exists across the whole District.

A new settlement was also the least favoured of all the options relating to the location of future development put forward at the earlier Issues & Options consultation stage in preparing the Core Strategy.

If the housing requirement for Stratford District is increased substantially in the RSS Revision, the District Council will have to reassess the situation. There are clearly physical and infrastructure limitations on how much development should take place in our existing towns and villages. At some point, therefore, it will be appropriate to consider the scope and opportunity for a new settlement (or major expansion of a new settlement) as the best means of meeting that additional scale of development.

East of Redditch Proposals Map

-  Proposed Employment Development Opportunity to meet the needs of Redditch
-  District Boundary
-  Green Belt
-  Proposed extension to Green Belt

Scale 1 : 10,000

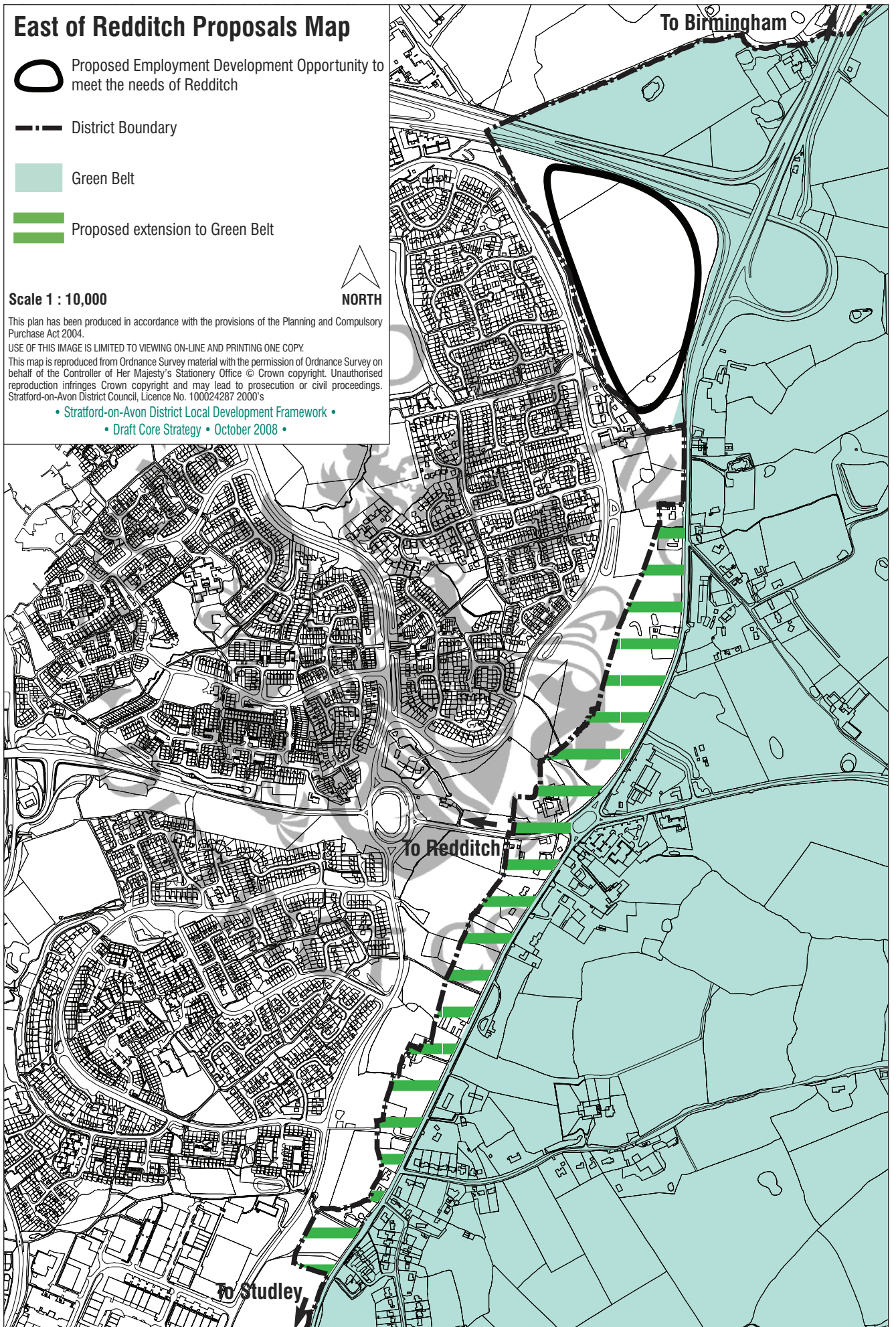


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- Stratford-on-Avon District Local Development Framework •
- Draft Core Strategy • October 2008 •



We have carried out an assessment of capacity and the suitability of land in identifying the range of development opportunities in this document (see Appendix B). This is based on the Council's preferred approach to dispersing development, with a focus on Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres. It is apparent from this work that a new settlement is likely to become a potential option should the District's housing requirement be increased by around 1000 or more dwellings, over and above the current requirement of 5,600 dwellings in the emerging RSS Revision.

Such a significant increase in the housing requirement would be based on the assertion that Stratford District should look to meet an element of demand from households wanting to move into the area, not just on meeting its own needs as is the case at the moment. A concentration of development in one location lends itself to responding to this demand, unlike meeting local needs where they arise which is a key justification, as things stand, for dispersing development.

If the District's housing requirement is increased substantially, the District Council will undertake a rigorous assessment to identify the most appropriate location for a new settlement. However, it should not be assumed that, through this process, the former MOD Depot at Long Marston would necessarily prove to be this location.

Theme 2: Providing for the needs of communities

The success of a development plan should be measured not just by the amount of development it enables but also the extent to which it contributes to the character, function and needs of communities. It is not sufficient to merely identify land for development; we need to show what purpose it has, how it will relate to existing communities and make sure that the necessary improvements to infrastructure and services are provided.

Sustainable development is about enabling people to enjoy a better quality of life, now and in the future. Decisions about the purpose of future development must take account of a wide range of costs and benefits, including those that cannot easily be valued in monetary terms. It is not possible to protect every bit of the environment for ever; in some cases meeting our needs for homes, jobs and facilities requires trade-offs to be made. However, it is critical to ensure that the best possible balance of outcomes is achieved.

Combating poverty and social exclusion is a core goal of national policy. In our country, everyone should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, through access to high quality public services, education and employment opportunities, decent housing and good quality local environments.

Homes

National and Regional context

The Government's policy document 'A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom' (1999) identified housing as a fundamental requirement of our society. It recognised that poor housing causes harm to health and is often associated with other social problems. The Government is also concerned to reduce the proportion of unfit stock and improve the quality of housing.

The Government's approach to the provision of housing is set out in PPS3²³. The main goal is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home which they can afford, in a community where they want to live. Four broad strategic objectives are identified:

- to achieve a wide choice of high quality homes, both affordable and market housing to address the requirements of the community
- to widen opportunities for home ownership and ensure high quality housing for those who cannot afford market housing, in particular those who are vulnerable or in need
- to improve affordability across the housing market, including by increasing the supply of housing
- to create sustainable, inclusive, mixed use communities in all areas, both urban and rural.

The provision of housing, its location, mix, design, type and function are therefore of crucial importance for local authorities to consider in their Local Development Frameworks. The Government also expects that LDFs will set out a strategy for the location of housing in suitable places which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, infrastructure and services.

²³ Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (2006)

Local planning authorities are required to deliver a flexible supply of land for housing that is available, suitable and has a reasonable prospect of coming forward for development within a reasonable timeframe. To help achieve this, our LDF should identify broad locations and specific sites that will enable a continuous delivery of housing for at least 15 years from the date of its adoption. This should include the provision of affordable housing for the local community. It is also necessary to provide a rolling five-year supply of land for housing development that is capable of being delivered.

The Regional Spatial Strategy provides a strategic context for the Core Strategy and it forms part of the development plan for the area. The adopted RSS provides housing requirements up to 2021. However, these are in the process of being superseded through the current RSS Phase Two Revision.

The Preferred Option document contains a housing growth figure for the District of 5,600 new dwellings for the period 2006–2026. It is acknowledged that the preparation of the RSS is on-going and our Core Strategy should be designed to be flexible enough to respond to any future changes in housing requirements that might arise.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The shortage of affordable housing is identified as a major issue affecting the District. The Community Plan sets out a clear desirable aim of providing sufficient housing of a variety of tenures to meet the needs of a range of people at a price they can afford. It also aims to ensure that older people, those with special needs or who are otherwise disadvantaged have access to housing that meets their specific requirements.

The District Council's latest Corporate Strategy sets a priority of making more housing available at a price local people can afford. A specific outcome sought is to deliver more affordable homes in the rural areas. The Strategy sets a target to provide 472 new affordable homes between 2008-2012.

Current situation

Stratford District has a distinctly rural character and this is reflected in the fact that 80% of its residents live outside the main town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Nearly 45% of residents live in parishes with a population of less than 3,000. Affordability of housing is a key challenge in the District. House prices and rents continue to rise and many people are unable to afford to buy or even rent a property. Reflecting the distribution of population in the District, nearly 80% of the overall level of unmet housing need arises from outside the town of Stratford-upon-Avon. However, this is not well reflected in the actual geographical distribution of new affordable homes.

The large backlog of unmet need is described in detail in the Joint Housing Assessment for South Warwickshire. Because of this, young people and families have to move out of the District. The Joint Housing Assessment also shows a significant need for affordable housing to cater for newly arising households. The lack of affordable homes has adverse consequences for the long-term sustainability of rural communities. Conversely, there are enough open market dwellings available to cater for the demand from local people.

The RSS Phase Two Revision Preferred Option sets out an indicative minimum target of 1000 affordable homes each year for the South Housing Market Area, which includes Stratford and Warwick Districts and all of Worcestershire.

According to the Joint Housing Assessment, there is a predicted net shortage of 954 affordable homes per annum for the next five years. The District has the highest house price to income ratio in the County. The total supply of affordable housing dwellings achieved in the period 1996–2006 was 997 units with the average number of units completed each year between 2001–2008 being only 117.

In 2007/2008 130 households in the District were accepted as homeless and in need of permanent housing. There are currently approximately 2,900 households on the Housing Waiting List. This emphasises further the need for affordable housing in the District.

As at 1 April 2008 there were approximately 1,575 vacant dwellings in the District. Of these, 900 had been vacant for more than six months. The Council has a programme to bring vacant homes back into use and this could make some contribution to the supply of affordable housing.

Consultation

Analysis of the responses to the Issues & Options document clearly reveals a strong measure of support for:

- providing affordable housing to meet local needs
- further market housing to meet the needs of existing households in the District and to reflect aspirations to move into the area
- meeting the specific needs of the elderly identified through housing surveys for a locality.

Sustainability Appraisal

The overall amount and distribution of new housing in the District, including an assessment of the various options for locating development, has already been covered under Theme 1 in this document.

It is clearly stated national policy to ensure that the wide-ranging needs of our population are met. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the approach taken in the Regional Spatial Strategy in relation to future housing provision in Stratford District is to focus on meeting the needs of our existing population. Unless and until this changes it is necessary for our Core Strategy to be consistent with this approach. To do otherwise would mean the Core Strategy did not conform to the RSS; one of the fundamental 'tests of soundness'. It would also serve to undermine the strategy of the RSS to concentrate development in the main conurbations and the towns identified for significant development.

As a result, no other option is tenable at the present time to justify assessment through the sustainability appraisal process. This situation will clearly need to be reviewed should the RSS Revision eventually take a different course and the housing requirement is increased significantly.

A number of policies are set out below dealing with the various aspects of our future approach to housing provision in the District.

Policy CS.7

The wide-ranging housing needs of the District will be met as far as is practicable. Provision is made for a net supply of at least 5,600 dwellings between 2006 and 2026 in accordance with the requirements of the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Draft Revision. Most of this will be concentrated in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres defined in Policy CS.1 where a wide range of facilities, jobs and services are available and accessible by modes other than the private car.

Areas of land identified in the Schedule of Development Opportunities in Appendix B, and shown on the Proposals Maps, will contribute substantially to this requirement and ensure a continuous delivery of housing for at least 15 years from the date of adoption of the Core Strategy. *It is estimated that these sites will yield approximately 2,550 dwellings during the Plan period.*

It is also expected that an additional 750 dwellings will come forward for development through windfall sources but will only count towards the supply figures from year ten after the date of adoption of the Core Strategy.

In all other settlements, residential development is acceptable in principle if it can be demonstrated to meet an identified local need in accordance with Policy CS.2. This is in addition to the provision set out above.

Policy CS.8

All residential development comprising 10 dwellings or more, or on a site of 0.3 hectares or more, is required to provide a proportion that is affordable, defined as being housing for social rent or for sale under a shared ownership lease.

A minimum of 35% floorspace should be affordable on all qualifying schemes. Applicants will have to prove that their proposal would not be viable through a financial appraisal and residual land value calculation in order to justify providing a lower proportion.

The following principles are applied:

- (a) applicants will have to prove that their proposal would not be viable through a financial appraisal and residual land value calculation in order to justify providing a lower proportion**
- (b) it is expected that all schemes should be achieved without recourse to public funds, through reduced land values**
- (c) the provision of affordable units will be secured by a legal agreement and be managed by a housing association or similar body**
- (d) the detailed form and tenure of affordable dwellings to be provided should reflect the nature of the need that has been identified.**
- (e) there is a presumption to provide the affordable housing on the application site as an integral part of an overall development scheme. In very exceptional circumstances, support may be given to off-site provision where this would offer an equivalent or better outcome in all respects.**

The requirements of this policy are applied to sheltered and 'extra care' housing schemes for the elderly where they include units of self-contained accommodation, although the calculation will exclude communal floorspace.

Policy CS.9

Specialist housing for the elderly and/or other vulnerable people is encouraged in order to:

- (a) enable continued independent living within self-contained accommodation, such as extra care**
- (b) provide support for those with specific needs.**

This form of development should be provided specifically in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres, including the Proposed Development Opportunities identified in the Core Strategy. Such provision should also be proportionate to identified District-wide needs

Elsewhere, provision will only be supported if it can be demonstrated that it is designed to meet an identified need for a specific local community in accordance with Policy CS.2.

Policy CS.10

When considering the appropriateness and acceptability of the range and mix of dwelling types and sizes proposed in any scheme, the following principles are taken into account:

- (a) in the case of market housing, dwellings should be provided broadly in the following proportions:**
 - 75% two and three bedroom dwellings, of which a maximum of 25% may take the form of flats or apartments**
 - 25% all other dwelling sizes**
- (b) sheltered housing schemes should provide a flexible range of care and support**
- (c) affordable and market dwellings should be evenly distributed throughout the site and be physically and visually indistinguishable**

- (d) dwellings that are suitable for occupation by families with children should incorporate a private garden**
- (e) the design of dwellings should make them suitable for working from home.**

In order to effectively discharge the District Council's Disability Equality Duty and to maximise the accessibility and flexibility of residential development, all new-build dwellings (affordable and market) are required to be designed and built to meet or exceed all relevant 'Lifetime Homes' standards (or any comparable successor standards).

Policy CS.11

In order to safeguard and facilitate the effective management and stewardship of the existing housing stock of the District as a vital resource the following principles are applied:

- (a) restrict the loss of existing dwellings to other uses**
- (b) support, in principle, the extension, improvement and replacement of existing permanent dwellings**
- (c) protect the amenity of existing and future occupiers of the residential properties**
- (d) facilitate and secure the re-use of empty buildings as homes.**

In considering any proposal, particular regard is given to the importance of:

- (a) the effective management of cumulative change in the profile of the District's housing stock**
- (b) improving the environmental performance of the existing stock to address climate change, water and energy security and efficiency issues.**

Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

National and Regional Context

Government guidance is provided principally in Circular 01/2006 – Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites. There is a clear requirement for the Local Development Framework to identify site specific allocations to meet identified needs for gypsy and traveller accommodation.

The Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision does not deal with the needs of gypsies and travellers. This will be covered as part of the proposed Phase Three Revision, which is at an early stage. Policy CF5 of the existing RSS states that Development Plans should ensure that adequate provision is made for suitable sites to accommodate gypsies and travellers. The level of provision should reflect the level of need as indicated by the Department of Communities & Local Government annual count and any additional local information.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

Neither the Community Plan nor the Corporate Strategy makes any direct reference to the needs of gypsies and travellers. It is clear however that making adequate provision to meet their accommodation needs would support the aims of the Corporate Strategy, particularly that to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Current Situation

A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) has been undertaken for the South Housing Market Area, which comprises the whole of Worcestershire together with Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick Districts. Within Stratford District the GTAA concludes that there is a need for 31 pitches arising from private and unauthorised sites, plus nine from an existing local authority site, and four from existing housing; a total of 44 pitches. This provision should be made within the next five years. Of the 44 overall requirement, 34 should be provided as permanent pitches to meet the needs of gypsies on existing public and private sites. The remaining 10 pitches are to be provided as a temporary stopping place to accommodate short term needs.

The key sources of the needs identified in the GTAA are summarised below:

- needs arising from the existing Local Authority Site at Pathlow
- needs arising from private sites with no security, i.e. are either unauthorised or have only temporary permission, at Bidford-on-Avon and Earlswood
- the need to provide a 'Temporary Stopping Place' to address the pattern of unauthorised encampments which occur on a temporary basis within the District.

The GTAA also included an assessment of the need for sites for Travelling Showpeople. No such needs have been identified in the District up to 2013.

The GTAA provides a robust assessment of the needs which exist within the District and it is important that the Core Strategy makes appropriate provision to address the situation.

Consultation

The majority of respondents who expressed an opinion at the Issues & Options consultation stage felt that there was not a need to provide additional accommodation for gypsies and travellers. It was noted however by a number of respondents that there was a lack of evidence at the time. This has now been addressed by the GTAA.

Sustainability Appraisal

National policy and the Regional Spatial Strategy require local authorities to make provision to meet the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers within their Local Development Frameworks. One option would be to include a criteria based policy within the Core Strategy and then identify sites through a separate Development Plan Document. This approach would inevitably delay the provision of suitable sites and Government Office has indicated that it is appropriate to identify site provision within the Core Strategy. In these circumstances there are no alternative options or approaches that should be considered.

Policy CS.12

Provision will be made for an additional 34 permanent pitches to meet the needs identified for Gypsies and Travellers in the period up to 2013. This pitch requirement will be met in the following ways:

- (a) the identification of up to two sites as an integral part of the Proposed Development Opportunities identified in Appendix B and shown on the Proposals Maps**
- (b) a small increase in the number of pitches at the existing local authority owned site at Pathlow.**

In addition to the provision of permanent pitches a site will be identified and provided in conjunction with Warwickshire County Council to provide a 'Temporary Stopping Place' of at least 10 pitches.

The identification of sites to meet any needs arising post 2013 will be addressed either through a partial review of the Core Strategy or the preparation of a separate Development Plan Document.

If circumstances change and a need for additional pitches is identified prior to 2013, proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- (a) proximity to settlements that support a range of services and facilities in order to meet the day-to-day needs of residents**
- (b) provision of a safe and convenient vehicular and pedestrian access**
- (c) satisfactory relationship to the highway network and accessibility by public transport**
- (d) provision of adequate on-site facilities for residents including parking, storage and amenity space.**
- (e) impact on the character of the local area, neighbouring properties or activities and features of acknowledged importance.**

Businesses and jobs

National and regional context

The UK's economy is changing rapidly in the face of global circumstances and it will have to adapt and become more innovative. Significant progress has been made in recent years, with low inflation and interest rates and high levels of employment.

One of the four aims set out in the Government's 'A Better Quality of Life – A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK' (1999) is the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. To help achieve this, local planning authorities are expected to:

- recognise that economic development can deliver environmental and social benefits
- ensure that suitable locations are available for industrial and commercial development so that the economy can prosper
- provide for improved productivity, choice and competition, particularly as the needs of modern business are changing rapidly
- be sensitive to changes in the local economy and the implications for development and growth.

Continuing prosperity and raising living standards depend on increasing productivity and even successful and vital areas of our economy, such as tourism, are experiencing difficulties. The current economic downturn is intensifying this situation but it is vital to prepare for an eventual recovery. Draft PPS4²⁴ expects local planning authorities to take a flexible approach to the supply and use of land for businesses.

A key objective of the West Midlands Economic Strategy is to broaden the economic base of the region; it is important that Stratford District plays its part in this process.

The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Revision specifies the following intentions for businesses and employment in rural areas such as Stratford District:

- growth should be limited to meeting local needs
- employment needs should be provided in a sustainable way
- provide good quality employment sites suitable for locally-based investment
- broaden the economic base, reduce over-reliance on traditional employment and provide a wider range of local job opportunities
- most economic development should be concentrated in towns and larger settlements accessible to their rural hinterlands
- promote agriculture and farm diversification.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan sets out clear, desirable aims about where the District wants to be in 2015. They include:

- an employment rate that is similar to the present time, meeting the employment needs of local residents
- a mix of businesses able to perform and compete in local, national and international markets
- improved skills and labour availability through training opportunities
- provision of land and property to support existing and new businesses.

The District Council's latest Corporate Strategy has as one of its key aims to achieve 'a District where business and enterprise can flourish' with a specific objective of assisting expanding local businesses to remain in the District. The Core Strategy has a vital role to play in setting an approach that will support business development and diversification.

Current situation

Stratford District and some of its neighbouring authorities are amongst the most productive in the West Midlands, reflecting the benefits of their location close to the relatively more buoyant South East and London economies. Productivity in the District is above the national average and well above that for the region as a whole.

However, the District has experienced low economic growth in recent years, with increases in jobs and earnings not keeping pace with national trends.

Throughout the global economy, the critical structural economic trend is the growth of the knowledge economy. In Stratford District this accounted for 22.9% of total employment in 2004, compared to 23.3% in Great Britain and 18.9% in the West Midlands as a whole. Although the growth in jobs in this sector has been sluggish, the District has recorded a growth rate just below the national average.

Business density in the District is exceptionally high; it is twice the national average, ranking it in the top five per cent of authorities nationally. In line with these figures the average business size is small by national standards, and compared with Coventry and Solihull which are far more reliant on larger businesses.

Whereas the new business formation rate is low, the survival rate is above average and the growth in stock over recent years has been good. Business closures are also lower than national, regional and sub-regional figures. In line with the figures on business size and density, self-employment levels in Stratford District are very high.

The employment rate in Stratford District stood at 80.7% in 2004, a figure well above that for the West Midlands region as a whole (73.4%) and the national average (74.4%).

Conversely, the unemployment level is very low, standing at only 1.0% in June 2008, whereas it was 3.0% for the West Midlands Region and 2.2% nationally.

Consultation

The responses to the Issues & Options consultation document showed that there was a slight majority in favour of not encouraging a large increase in jobs in the District. A number of respondents specified that high-tech jobs should particularly be encouraged. There was also some support for creating higher paid and higher skilled professional and managerial jobs. Many comments related to the need to achieve a better balance between homes and jobs, to reduce levels of commuting and meet the needs of local communities.

The majority of respondents agreed that the District's economy should be allowed to diversify. In order to achieve this, a wide range of business types and jobs were mentioned. New technology companies were specified most frequently. Tourism-based businesses (but not Shakespeare-related) were the next most frequently mentioned, although others were against more tourism. There was a variety of references supporting small-scale businesses of various types across the District, such as local produce and crafts.

Sustainability Appraisal

Three discrete options were identified and have been assessed in relation to economic development:

Option 1 - Maintaining the existing level of economic activity

Option 2 - Encouraging economic growth across the whole District

Option 3 - Focusing growth in specific sectors and locations

Justification for Preferred Option

Based on the assessment, it is clear that Option 3 makes a more positive contribution to the objective of achieving sustainable economic development given the circumstances faced by Stratford District:

- consistent with national and regional policy
- consistent with Community Plan and Corporate Strategy
- some level of support expressed in consultation process
- would help to tackle relative poverty and disadvantage amongst local residents
- provides scope to locate development in sustainable locations, utilise infrastructure effectively and reduce the need to travel by car
- should create a more sustainable pattern of economic growth
- more likely that jobs suited to the local workforce would be created
- scope to encourage enterprise and attract technology and knowledge-based jobs
- potential to support tourism and visitor attractions.

Reasons for rejecting other options

Option 1 would actually result in a relative decline in prosperity and employment. This approach would not be consistent with national and regional policies or the emphasis of the Community Plan and the District Council's Corporate Strategy.

Option 2 would not be sensitive towards the District's character or necessarily meet the needs of its residents in the most effective way. It would also make it more difficult to promote development in sustainable locations.

Policy CS.13

The development and expansion of businesses that contribute to the local economy and support local jobs is encouraged. Provision will be made for at least 17 hectares of land to be readily available for employment development during any five year period between 2006 and 2026. This will be achieved through the following means:

- (a) implementation of locations for business development identified in the Schedule of Development Opportunities in Appendix B and shown on the Proposals Maps**
- (b) protection of existing industrial areas from redevelopment or conversion to non-employment uses unless clearly justified in accordance with Policy CS.14**
- (c) expansion of existing businesses in their established locations unless this would cause unacceptable impact**
- (d) small-scale business schemes which will meet the proven needs of rural communities in accordance with the provisions of Policy CS.2**
- (e) re-use of rural buildings that are suitable for conversion given their character and location**
- (f) farm diversification schemes that contribute to the long-term operation and viability of the farm-holding**
- (g) small-scale expansion for employment uses of existing rural buildings that are sufficiently close to Stratford-upon-Avon or a Main Rural Centre to be reached by foot or cycle**
- (h) redevelopment of existing business premises at a similar scale for other suitable uses that would support jobs**
- (i) workspace associated with residential development, including live/work units and home-working**

Particular encouragement is given to schemes involving technology and knowledge-based businesses.

The District Council is concerned that existing industrial sites and premises are coming under increasing pressure for redevelopment, particularly due to the emphasis on re-using previously developed land for housing. It is essential for the maintenance of balanced communities and to limit the need to travel that employment opportunities are retained at a local level. In many cases, there is no overriding reason why an established business use of a site cannot continue through adaptation, redevelopment and re-occupancy by new companies.

Many businesses can operate in residential and rural areas without causing unacceptable disturbance or detriment to the character of the area. Small businesses make an important contribution to the structure of many communities as well as providing local employment. The removal of premises or sites which are doing little environmental harm, to be replaced by residential development, is considered to be potentially damaging to the local economy.

However, we do need to take a realistic approach to this issue. National policy makes it clear that land currently or previously in employment use that is no longer viable or appropriate for such purposes should not be held on to if an alternative use would be beneficial. This issue is emphasised in Draft PPS4 which expects a constructive approach to changes of use where there is no likelihood of demonstrable harm and to encourage new uses for vacant or derelict buildings.

The emerging RSS Phase Two Revision includes a policy on the loss of employment land (see Policy PA6B), but the policy below provides a more detailed application of this issue to the circumstances of Stratford District.

Policy CS.14

Proposals that involve the development or conversion of existing or committed industrial areas to non-employment uses need to be fully justified. The following factors are taken into account:

- (a) the role of the site in supporting employment within the context of the regional and local development strategy**

- (b) the importance of the site in providing a range and choice of sites for employment in the local area, including the needs of small firms and business start-ups**
- (c) the requirements of any businesses that would be displaced as a result of a redevelopment scheme**
- (d) the rate of loss of employment land to other uses that has already been experienced in the local area and the District as a whole**
- (e) the scale of employment opportunities that would be provided on the site through the alternative uses proposed or as part of a mixed use development**
- (f) the extent to which the existing employment uses are having a detrimental impact on the amenity and character of the area**
- (g) the evidence provided by the applicant on the extent of marketing of the site for employment purposes that has been undertaken and the response received.**

The suitability of the proposed alternative use of the site will be assessed against the overall strategy for locating development in the District.

Tourism

National and Regional Policy Context

The Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism (May 2006) states that development suited to a town centre should be allowed only in town centres. Elsewhere the impacts on the viability and vitality of town centres, and accessibility without a car, should be weighed against factors such as the chance to enhance a site, provide facilities for local residents, and diversify the local economy.

The emerging RSS Revision encourages development of tourism and culture as an important contribution to the local economy and environmental improvement, subject to the capacity of infrastructure and the environment to accommodate facilities and visitors. Stratford-upon-Avon and Shakespeare Country are identified as key regional tourism and cultural assets. A settlement hierarchy is at the heart of development policies in the RSS, so major uses which attract large numbers of visitors should ideally be located in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Community Plan/ Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan wishes to see tourism, and the international profile of Shakespeare, supporting the economy across the District rather than just in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Corporate Strategy aims to increase economic viability in the four main market towns through delivery of the World Class Stratford programme and through action plans to achieve market town area visions, each of which emphasises the importance of tourism.

The Corporate Strategy also seeks to encourage extended visitor stays and improve the range of visitor attractions across the District. It specifies that local planning policies should be assessed with a view to taking a more positive approach towards proposals for hotel development in the District.

Current situation

Our District is renowned as a destination for regional, national and international visitors, and tourism plays an essential role in supporting the local economy. In 2001²⁵ there were about 5.5 million visitors to the District spending £238 million. Tourism supports approximately 5,700 direct jobs and a further 1,200 jobs from multiplier spending in the District. However many jobs directly in tourism have low pay in comparison to the high cost of living in the District²⁶.

Stratford-upon-Avon is the main focus of visits and received 3.8 millions visitors in 2006²⁷. The town supports an extensive range of shops, restaurants and three theatres run by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Visitors are attracted by the history and setting of the town with its river, parks, historic buildings and heritage. However the town compares poorly with other historic towns in terms of value for money of attractions, congestion and traffic threat, with a low number of visitors arriving by public transport. There is concern that visitor numbers have been declining recently, and that the limited scope of attractions and the quality of the town centre environment needs to be improved to continue to attract visitors.

²⁵ Tourism Economic Impact Assessment for Stratford-on-Avon District by Visit Heart of England for Stratford District Council. Data for 2005 is available for the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region but it does not specify figures for Stratford District

²⁶ Tourism Economic Impact Assessment for Stratford-on-Avon District, by Visit Heart of England for Stratford District Council (2001)

²⁷ World Class Stratford Urban Design Framework Issues and Opportunities Report, Urban Practitioners (April 2006)

The World Class Stratford initiative, led by a range of partners including the District Council, with financial support from Advantage West Midlands, seeks to respond to these concerns. The Urban Design Framework identifies major projects including the redevelopment of the Bridgeway area to connect the town with the river and provide a major new cultural attraction. The re-landscaping of Bancroft Gardens, in conjunction with the major refurbishment of the main RSC Theatre, forms the first significant part of the project.

The Market Town area visions for Southam, Shipston and Alcester all recognise the value of tourism to the local economy, though each has different aspirations for the form this should take. Alcester wishes to develop a reputation as a festival town, a stop-over for walkers and cyclists, and to promote its Roman heritage. Southam has schemes underway to support local attractions such as the Holy Well and to promote its Civil War links. Shipston is to promote itself as a base from which to explore the Cotswolds and Shakespeare country rather than develop new attractions itself. Schemes will be taken forward through Market Town action plans and the related Better Welcome project with support from the District Council.

Consultation

The majority of respondents at the Issues & Options stage said that it is not appropriate to provide further attractions in Stratford-upon-Avon because of concerns that infrastructure is already overloaded, that it would damage the market town appeal of the town or result in 'down-market' attractions.

Outside Stratford-upon-Avon, many respondents supported attractions which rely on and contribute to the rural nature of the area such as walking and cycling, wildlife habitats and farm visits. Some were concerned to avoid increasing car trips and to protect the main attraction of unspoilt countryside.

Sustainability Appraisal

Two discrete options were identified for assessment; one based on national and regional policy and one on the majority response to the Issues & Options consultation:

Option 1: Cultural and visitor attractions should be supported where they are appropriate to the size, role and character of the settlement. Small-scale tourism-based schemes which help to provide local employment and support for existing rural services should be encouraged across the District.

Option 2: Further large-scale visitor attractions should not be supported within the District, even within the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon. Small-scale tourism-based schemes would be acceptable where they promote and enhance the rural or agricultural nature of their setting.

Justification for Preferred Option

Option 1 performs best in the Sustainability Appraisal against almost all sustainability criteria and ties in well with the policy context and local initiatives. The Appraisal highlights the valuable contributions that tourism development can make towards economic growth, supporting local services and providing investment to maintain local heritage, landscape and public realm to a high standard. These objectives will only be achieved, however, if development is sensitive to the character of the area.

A majority of respondents to the Issues & Options consultation did not support further tourist developments in Stratford-upon-Avon. However the main reasons that they give for this should be addressed by ensuring that development is appropriate and sensitive to the character of the area, and that the infrastructure for tourists is improved, for example through World Class Stratford projects.

The approach also needs to be supported by good walking, cycling and public transport facilities within and between Stratford-upon-Avon and the main rural centres.

Reasons for rejecting other options

Option 2 is inconsistent with regional and national policy which emphasises the strong benefits of tourism to the region and the need to continue improving the offer for visitors. It is also incompatible with the World Class Stratford initiative and more modest proposals coming forward through the Market Town area visions. Restraining the aspirations for these communities to provide more facilities for visitors would reduce the potential benefits of tourism for a range of sustainability objectives.

Policy CS.15

Tourism and visitor-based proposals, including overnight accommodation, are supported where they are appropriate to the size and role of the settlement. Development has to be sensitive to the character of the area and designed to maximise the benefits for local communities. Small-scale tourism-based schemes which help to provide local employment and support for existing rural services are encouraged across the District.

Within the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon, major visitor attractions are encouraged and the visitor offer will be extended and improved through the World Class Stratford initiative. The aspirations of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam to improve their visitor offer are supported through projects such as the Market Towns Initiative and its Better Welcome scheme.

Visitor accommodation may also be justified where it is directly associated with a major existing tourist, conference or recreation complex.

Town and local centres

National and regional context

The Government's key objective for town centres, as set out in PPS6²⁸, is to promote their vitality and viability by planning for the growth and development of existing centres, as well as promoting and enhancing them by encouraging a wide range of services in an attractive, accessible environment. There is a general expectation that retail and other uses, such as offices and entertainment, should be focused on existing centres rather than in out-of-town centre locations.

Additional aims of Government in relation to retailing are:

- to enhance consumer choice, particularly for socially-excluded groups
- to support efficient, competitive and innovative forms of shopping
- to improve accessibility by ensuring that new development is well-served by a choice of transport.

In relation to rural market towns, PPS6 states that they should be the main service centres in rural areas, providing a range of facilities, shops and services at a scale that is appropriate to the needs and size of their catchment area.

A network of local centres in towns and villages is also recognised as being essential to provide easily accessible shopping to meet day-to-day needs, as well as local services and community facilities.

The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Revision specifies the following intention for town and local centres in relation to Stratford District:

- Stratford-upon-Avon is the only 'strategic' centre in the District and is the preferred location for major retail, leisure and office developments
- there should be a proactive approach to identifying potential sites for development within strategic centres
- priority should be given to encouraging a wide range of uses in town centres to avoid vulnerability due to excessive reliance on limited functions
- smaller centres are intended to meet day-to-day needs of their communities for convenience shopping and local services.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan sets out a number of clear aims about where the District wants to be in 2015 which have a bearing on town and local centres:

- build on the market town initiative to develop partnerships to support community-based activities and facilities
- provision of leisure and recreational facilities to meet the needs of local people
- tourism will support the economy across the whole District
- a range of transport initiatives developed to help people access services and facilities.

The District Council's latest Corporate Strategy includes an aim to increase the economic viability of the four main market towns in the area, based on the visions and action plans that have been produced for each of them.

Current situation

Stratford-upon-Avon is the main shopping and commercial centre in the District. It has a good quality retail offer given its size and a wide range of other commercial and leisure uses are supported. However, high rents have meant that independent traders and 'local' businesses tend to be squeezed out of the main shopping area.

The town is facing increasing competition from larger shopping centres nearby, such as Solihull, Royal Leamington Spa, Redditch and Banbury, as well as increasingly from electronic retailing (e-tailing). Conversely, increasing consumer spending and growth in leisure shopping, at least until the recent economic downturn, has helped to bolster the town centre.

The Main Rural Centres each provide a range of local facilities, particularly the historic market towns of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam. But, once again, it is difficult for them to maintain their role in the face of competition from larger centres. There is a degree of stagnation due to limited investment and few new businesses being attracted. Their relationship with smaller villages around them also seems to be weakening in some cases.

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The District Council has had a Retail Study produced by specialist consultants to assess the need for additional convenience shopping floorspace in Stratford-upon-Avon and the rural market towns of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam. The study found that there is scope to provide more floorspace given increases in population and spending power, as well as to reduce the amount of spending that currently 'leaks' to stores outside the District, such as those in Redditch, Leamington and Banbury.

The study recommends that it would be preferable to provide additional convenience floorspace in the three rural market towns rather than in Stratford town. At the present time all three offer only a limited choice, with restricted competition and comparatively high prices. The consultants are of the opinion that a larger foodstore, comprising around 2,500 square metres (gross) in each of the three market towns would help 'claw back' spending. As a result, this would bolster other shops and services in these towns because fewer local people would go elsewhere to do their main shop.

The difficulty in all three market towns, however, is finding a suitable site in or well related to the existing centres. If this is not possible and such a foodstore could only be positioned at the edge of the town, the District Council will want to be confident that this would complement and not harm the centre itself. Alcester Town Council has already expressed the view that a large foodstore outside its town centre would be harmful to the businesses in the centre and would not be acceptable.

Given the focus on supporting the role of rural market towns, there would be only limited need to increase provision in Stratford town, due to the finite amount of spending capacity within the population. The consultants indicate that the only potential 'gap' in the offer currently provided in the town appears to be for a food discount store.

A Retail Study produced in 1997 and updated in 2003 showed a need for additional comparison floorspace, of over 14,000 square metres, in the period to 2011. There has been very little development in the town centre since that time, although there has been a major expansion of the Maybird Centre during 2008. A substantial increase in comparison floorspace is sought by the Regional Spatial Strategy Draft Revision. It looks for about 25,000 square metres to be provided in the town between 2006 and 2021 and a further 10,000 square metres by 2026.²⁹

Based on analysis undertaken by consultants, the Urban Development Framework remarks on the particular lack of large units that typically tend to be required by national multiple retailers, a number of which are known to be interested in having a presence in Stratford town centre. There is a suitable opportunity for addressing this issue through the regeneration of the area between Rother Street and Grove Road, known as the Rother Quarter.

The visions produced for the four market towns in the District each specify the importance of supporting the commercial centres, attracting new shops and other businesses, and with a specific emphasis on offering a wide choice of local produce. Various Parish Plans produced for the other Main Rural Centres stress the importance of supporting their local shops and services.

Consultation

Surprisingly, given the importance placed on the role of our main centres outlined above, the response to the Issues & Options consultation was less decisive. Only 21% of those who expressed an opinion thought there should be more retail development in Stratford town centre, although there was greater support (46%) with respect to the larger rural settlements.

Sustainability Appraisal

There appear to be three distinctive, realistic and strategic options that should be considered in relation to planning for the future of the District's main centres. These are:

Option 1: Maintaining the existing situation in terms of retail provision and other facilities in the main centres

Option 2: Encouraging the provision of further retail and other facilities only in Stratford-upon-Avon town centre

Option 3: Encouraging the provision of further retail and other facilities in all the main centres in the District

Justification for Preferred Option

Based on the assessment carried out, it is apparent that Option 3 makes a more positive contribution towards the objective of achieving sustainable development given the circumstances faced by Stratford District.

Such an approach can be justified on a wide range of grounds:

- consistent with national and regional policy
- consistent with Community Plan and Corporate Strategy
- some level of support expressed in consultation process (although limited support in relation to Stratford-upon-Avon)
- improvement in provision of facilities in the main centres would assist quality of life and opportunities for local people
- on balance, such improvements should help to maintain the character of centres rather than be a threat
- it would help to reduce the need to travel and make a positive contribution towards managing climate change
- it would be the most sustainable approach by providing scope for all the larger centres to experience managed growth
- provides scope for creating new employment opportunities
- provides scope for investment and innovation by businesses
- it would help to spread the benefits of tourism across the District.

Reasons for rejecting other options

It is clear that merely maintaining the existing level of shops, services and commercial activity in the main centres of the District would result in a relative decline and gradual deterioration in their role and value. Option 1 would have the additional disbenefits of:

- not being consistent with the overall objective of national and regional policy
- causing a relative decline in the role of centres and reducing their value to local people
- leading to a relative decline in access to local facilities
- increasing the need to travel in order to gain access to a greater range of facilities.

Under Option 2, although Stratford-upon-Avon is clearly the largest centre in the District and, in accordance with strategic policy, should be the focus of major commercial development, there would be clear advantages in also providing scope for the rural centres to expand their role in order to benefit local people and businesses.

Policy CS.16

Large-scale retail and other forms of commercial development, defined as exceeding 1,000 square metres (gross), should take place within or on the edge of Stratford-upon-Avon town centre.

Any such development that is promoted elsewhere in the District requires a comprehensive assessment to seek to justify the proposed location and to show that:

- (a) there are no suitable sites available for the proposed use within or on the edge of Stratford town centre**
- (b) the proposal would not have a detrimental impact on the vitality and viability of Stratford town centre or any of the Main Rural Centres**
- (c) the proposal would help to reduce the number and length of car journeys**
- (d) the development would be readily accessible by foot, cycle and public transport from residential areas.**

The exception to this approach is that the principle of providing a foodstore of up to 2,500 square metres (gross) in the town centres of Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour and Southam is supported. Any proposal elsewhere in each of the towns will need to satisfy criteria (b) to (d) above, as well as prove that there is not a suitable site available within the town centre.

The role of local centres within towns and larger villages is supported through resisting the loss of retail and other commercial premises.

Infrastructure and facilities

The Planning White Paper 2007, sets out proposals for a forward-looking approach to infrastructure provision at the local level. It looks to move away from 'site specific planning of infrastructure delivery to a more strategic and holistic view, which takes infrastructure decisions on roads alongside those of, for example, schools, hospitals, cultural and community facilities' (para. 8.26)

The Government has also made it clear that the Local Strategic Partnership for an area, which comprises a wide range of agencies, has a key role to play in co-ordinating the delivery of appropriate social and community infrastructure, particularly for areas of new development, renewal or regeneration.

It is essential that the Local Development Framework as a whole identifies the infrastructure requirements that are integral to the way in which the area functions. This is particularly necessary in relation to the impact of future development. It is also important to identify the agencies that are responsible for delivering specific projects.

It is imperative that the utility suppliers, such as the water, electricity and gas companies, can and do make the improvements that are necessary to serve existing and new development. With regard to the latter, if there are technical or financial reasons why a potential development site cannot be served by the necessary infrastructure and services, its implementation will be prevented or delayed until these improvements can be made.

Three specific aspects of providing the necessary support for residents, communities and businesses are covered in more detail.

Transport

National and regional context

National policy objectives on transport seek to:

- promote more sustainable transport choices for people and for moving freight
- protect and enhance the built and natural environment
- improve safety for all travellers
- promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling
- reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

Furthermore, they seek to integrate different types of transport with the approach to land-use planning, the provision of services and wealth creation. Delivering these objectives is essential to achieve sustainable development and minimise social exclusion, particularly in rural areas like much of Stratford-on-Avon District.

The Regional Transport Strategy provides the regional context for transport policy for the West Midlands. It supports the broader objectives of the regional economic and spatial strategies. It promotes a holistic approach, supported by a coherent package of measures to address the national objectives. It also promotes travel awareness initiatives, appropriate demand management measures and better management of the existing network.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan sets out clear, desirable aims about where the District wants to be in 2015 in relation to transport. They include:

- visitors to Stratford-upon-Avon town centre increasingly arrive by modes of transport other than the private car
- more short journeys by people living in the town are made on foot, by cycle or by bus
- a range of transport initiatives have been developed to help people gain access to facilities and participate in a range of activities
- fewer people are killed and injured in road traffic accidents.

One of the key aims of the District Council's Corporate Strategy is to provide residents with easier access to local public services. It specifically looks towards improvements to community transport to help those who don't have the use of a car.

Current situation

There is no doubt that transport plays a key role in improving the quality of life and prosperity of our residents. It is also vital for economic growth. Achieving these things while, at the same time, securing a sustainable transport system presents a significant challenge.

The level of car ownership in the District is the highest in Warwickshire, with 86% of households owning one car and 47% having two or more cars. Traffic has increased 11% over the past ten years. Conversely, over 6,400 households do not have a car and are therefore dependent on other forms of transport.

Despite the relatively small size of the towns and villages in our District, only 2.6% of residents use a bicycle and 9.4% walk on a regular basis as a means of undertaking a journey.

As the rural economy becomes more diversified, the potential for increased traffic on rural roads poses a threat to the essential rural character of many parts of the District. We need to recognise the implications for delivering these aspirations through the way our transport system is managed.

The manner in which we distribute development and services also has significant implications for travel. If we aim to meet the needs of local communities for homes and jobs and extend the benefits of tourism across the District we run the risk of increasing the volume of traffic on rural roads. On the other hand, if we concentrate development in the larger urban areas, we risk increasing the distance travelled to reach services by people living in rural locations.

What is more, the spread of settlements in the District can make public transport uneconomic to operate and there is a lack of frequent bus services through many villages, other than those lying on main roads between larger settlements. Only 3% of the District's residents use public transport regularly.

The Local Transport Plan, produced by Warwickshire County Council, sets out the strategy and priorities for transport provision. The current LTP identifies tackling congestion and reducing the impact of vehicles on the environment as priorities, particularly in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Consultation

Responses to consultation on the Issues & Options document revealed a strong measure of support for investment to improve both the road network and public transport, but particularly the latter.

A number of specific road schemes were mentioned, mainly in and around Stratford-upon-Avon. The scope to make better use of existing road space and for traffic calming was also mentioned.

In relation to public transport, the re-opening of the Stratford to Cheltenham railway line was raised. Improved integration between bus and rail services was suggested, along with better bus services for rural communities.

Sustainability Appraisal

Three discrete options were identified and have been assessed in relation to transport provision:

Option 1 - emphasis on road building with supplementary measures to improve parking and highway safety and effective management of road space

Option 2 - emphasis on public transport with supplementary measures to improve parking and highway safety and effective management of road space

Option 3 - focus on public transport, walking and cycling but with new road building schemes supported where clearly justified in order to improve the character and function of communities and the effective operation of the local economy.

Justification for Preferred Option

Based on the assessment, Option 3 is promoted as the preferred option as it focuses on improving less environmentally damaging forms of transport but acknowledges that road building can be justified in specific circumstances. Such an approach offers a wide range of benefits:

- consistent with national, regional and local transport objectives/policy
- supported by consultation response
- would contribute positively towards healthy lifestyles
- would help tackle disadvantage by promoting social inclusion
- provides sustainable access to services/facilities
- positive contribution to improvements to environmental quality
- less impact on the use of resources
- would better facilitate modal shift away from private car use
- encourages sustainable economic growth and tourism.

Reasons for rejecting other options

Option 1 manifests a wide range of potential negative impacts, including on climate change, air pollution and energy consumption. Furthermore, it would not encourage more environmentally-friendly and healthy means of travel, and tends to disadvantage those people without a car thus increasing social exclusion.

Option 2 has significant environmental benefits but may not be sufficiently comprehensive to deal with transport problems faced by the District in every circumstance. For example, where there is a need for a significant amount of development it will be essential to deal effectively with its impacts on existing communities.

Policy CS.17

In order to tackle congestion, reduce adverse environmental impact and improve access for all, emphasis is given to the provision of public transport services and better conditions for walking and cycling.

Improvements will be made to the existing road network, including the management of road space, so that it functions more effectively.

New road building schemes are supported only where it is demonstrated that improvements to public transport, walking and cycling are not appropriate or sufficiently effective to deal with the specific situation.

In Stratford-upon-Avon, the provision of additional park and ride facilities will be considered and the amount of long-stay car parking in the town centre will be assessed, taking into account the need to bolster its role as a shopping and service centre.

Improvements to public car parking in rural centres are supported if this would help to support their role and attract people to use the services they provide.

Services

National and regional context

A key component of national planning policy is to achieve social cohesion and inclusion. This means meeting the diverse needs of people, including access for all members of the community to a wide range of services, such as education, health, leisure and community facilities.

The Regional Spatial Strategy recognises the importance of access to services to the quality of life, particular those who live in rural areas. The need to protect and retain services is crucial and the RSS seeks to encourage a co-ordinated approach between local authorities and other service providers to ensure good quality services in rural areas. Local authorities are encouraged to deliver service strategies and delivery options.

The Countryside Agency's Rural Services Survey in 2000 showed that the West Midlands Region has a higher proportion of rural parishes without essential services than England as a whole.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan identifies the importance of local services. It looks to maximise the use of existing facilities such as schools, libraries and village halls for community uses. The provision of new facilities is supported where they are needed.

It also seeks to make Stratford District a 'total learning community', where everyone has the opportunity to be engaged in learning. This is seen to bring benefits to individuals, families and businesses.

The District Council's new Corporate Strategy also has a priority of giving residents easier access to local public services by providing information and advice closer to the community.

Current situation

We all wish to have easy access to and enjoy high quality services. Achieving this will require a comprehensive look at the manner in which services are provided and where they are located. In particular, it is important to consider the availability of services at places where they are needed and can be sustained and the physical means of getting to them.

The Local Development Framework has a role to play in influencing the location of services but the planning system cannot provide all the answers when it comes to service provision, quality and cost. It should look to provide a framework to influence the location and retention of services, while the Council works with various partners to ensure their delivery.

There is no doubt that the quality of many of our services is high. The recent Ofsted Report on the state of schools in the District demonstrates this. However, the size of the District and the geographical spread of settlements place severe constraints on the provision of some basic services, such as doctor's surgeries and post offices, leading to closures. The consequence is that many people have to travel longer distances to enjoy some basic services. This is having a detrimental effect on the function and health of communities.

This situation is exacerbated by the lack of public transport in many parts of the District which is a major disadvantage for those without access to a car. The distance and costs involved in getting to services are becoming increasingly problematic to many people.

Stratford District benefits from generally high levels of qualifications; better than the national average and well above that for the West Midlands region. However, 34% of our working population is qualified below NVQ 2 level, the official definition of 'skills poverty'. There would be clear advantages for the local economy if skill levels were improved since this would assist in attracting new companies to the area. It would also help to increase incomes in an area where property prices are very high.

The agencies that support education and learning will be more effective if they worked more closely together. This includes making sure there is scope for our schools and colleges to provide the quality of education all sections of our community require. A number of secondary schools in the District need extensive modernisation, even replacement.

Of particular importance is the availability of learning opportunities in places that are convenient and accessible. As well as traditional centres of education, there is an important role for libraries, community centres and village halls to play.

Another fundamental aspect of service provision to meet the needs of our residents is the health sector. Stratford District is one of the healthiest areas of Great Britain. Average life expectancy in the area was 80.2 years in 2002/04, compared with 78.5 years nationally.

The main hospital in the District is at Stratford-upon-Avon. This supports a Minor Injuries Unit and a wide range of services but does not have an Accident & Emergency facility. Alcester Community Hospital is a GP unit for the local community, offering opportunities for rehabilitation. The Ellen Badger Community Hospital in Shipston-on-Stour provides in-patient and out-patient services for people living in the locality.

Almost every planning decision has a potential effect on human health. It is also important to make sure that medical services are provided and improved as necessary through the planning system, including in response to development and increases in population.

Consultation

It is not surprising to note that the vast majority of respondents (98%) thought that local services should be retained and improved wherever possible.

People expect the planning system to seek the retention of existing services and also to set a positive framework for the provision of new and improved services through development and developer contributions. A number of specific suggestions were made, including the provision of residential development in villages and resisting the change of use of existing services.

There was a range of services suggested which local people would like to have provided. The District Council will need to work with its partners to facilitate their delivery. For certain services the Council might have to play a leadership role in lobbying central government to support their provision.

There was a strong measure of support for providing improved opportunities for lifelong learning and developing skills at the local level. A number of respondents emphasised the importance of schools, colleges and the business sector working together to provide the skills that are needed.

Sustainability Appraisal

The following options in relation to the provision of services have been identified based on the circumstances faced in Stratford District:

Option 1 – concentrate services in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres

Option 2 – disperse services around the smaller villages of the District

Option 3 – promote the provision of services in accordance with the size and function of the settlement.

All the above options could be complemented by a robust framework to retain and protect existing services as far as possible.

Justification for Preferred Option

Option 3 is identified as the preferred option. Local services are essential to creating sustainable communities. The decline of these services in recent years, particularly in smaller villages, has been marked. Consequently, the need to travel and the distances travelled to reach many services continue to increase. Public transport is relatively poor in many rural parts of the District and most journeys are made by car. A significant proportion of the population, particularly the elderly and the young, do not have access to a car and are becoming increasingly isolated.

Local services and facilities are at the heart of villages and engender community spirit. The retention of local facilities and services will assist in curbing the decline in community life. It would also make a positive contribution to reducing energy consumption and social exclusion.

However, it is reasonable on the grounds of sustainability and viability to accept that not all settlements could or should have the same level and scale of services. Different settlements perform different functions. It is appropriate to promote services comparable to the function of the individual settlement. While there has been some criticism that larger rural settlements have been the focus of support to the detriment of smaller villages, they have been effective in creating a network of commercial and public facilities that are relatively accessible. We believe that the role of the Main Rural Centres as a focus of service provision should be maintained.

Reasons for rejecting other options

Option 1 has the potential to increase the need to travel and distance travelled predominantly by car because of the disposition of settlements and lack of public transport in many parts of the District. Consequently, it could have negative impacts on pollution and climate change. It would exacerbate social exclusion particularly for those who live in remote villages without access to a private car. There are no obvious benefits in, and no significant public support for, the closure and decline of local services.

It would be unrealistic to seek to provide the same level and scale of services and facilities in each of the settlements of the District, as Option 2 seeks. It would be impractical to sustain their viability because most settlements would lack the critical mass of population to support such services.

Policy CS.18

The scale and nature of service provision will reflect and relate to the size and function of the individual settlement.

It is expected that existing local services and community facilities are retained unless it can be demonstrated that:

- (a) there is no realistic prospect of the use continuing for commercial and/or operational reasons**
- (b) the site has been actively marketed or otherwise made available for a similar or alternative type of service or facility that would be of benefit to the community**
- (c) the service or facility can be provided effectively in an alternative manner or on a different site in accordance with the wishes of the local community**
- (d) there are overriding environmental benefits in the use of the site being discontinued.**

Improvements to local services and facilities should be an integral part of development. The form of such provision will take into account the impact of the proposal, the nature of the settlement and the needs of the community.

Recreation

National and regional context

National guidance set out in PPG17³⁰ sets out how planning for everyday leisure can contribute to a broad range of Government objectives including raising the quality of life and health of local residents, promoting social inclusion and promoting more sustainable development by ensuring people can access facilities by foot, cycle or public transport. Local authorities should determine the needs of their area for open space and recreation. The current provision can then be assessed against these standards and opportunities for improvement identified.

The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Revision encourages green infrastructure, in the context of climate change and creating sustainable communities, because of its benefits for sport, providing sustainable transport options, biodiversity and allowing wildlife migration, carbon sinks and mitigation of heat island effects. The RSS sets out general principles for the location of development and services: town centres should serve as a focus for major leisure and cultural facilities which will draw large numbers of people, and market towns and larger villages should play a role in providing a good range of everyday services.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan identifies leisure and culture as a priority area for the District. It aspires to a situation where local people are aware of and able to access local and regional leisure and cultural opportunities, lead active lifestyles, and where leisure brings communities together. It seeks to increase participation in local clubs, especially by young people.

The District Council's new Corporate Strategy also looks to encourage healthier lifestyles by extending opportunities for active sport and recreation. It aims to provide a high quality environment by protecting and maintaining our current green spaces and providing new public open spaces.

Current situation

Access to good quality recreation facilities and open space (such as sports centres, community halls, playing fields, children's play areas and allotments), is vital to meet the everyday needs of local residents. Some of the issues to be considered in this topic are very similar to those discussed in the section on other services such as schools and shops, particularly the challenge of distributing facilities to ensure access to all in our large rural district. We have considered open space and recreation separately because of the special and varied roles that they can play in achieving sustainable development, and also because the District Council is directly involved in the provision and maintenance of recreation facilities, unlike many other everyday services.

71% of the District's residents³¹ think that physical activity is important to quality of life, and Parish Plans clearly identify access to open space and facilities for recreation as an important issue for many rural communities. Because much of the District is made up of attractive countryside, it is not surprising that residents feel that access to the footpath network has a big impact on their personal health and well-being.

³⁰ Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)

³¹ Quality of Life Survey, Warwickshire County Council (2005)

An audit of public open spaces in Stratford-upon-Avon and the Main Rural Centres in 2005 assessed the amount of open space provided per resident against national standards. It found that almost all of our larger settlements have a deficit of children's play areas, and two-thirds of them have a deficit of adult recreation space.

In terms of major indoor facilities, the District Council runs leisure centres in Stratford-upon-Avon, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam and Studley. There is also a dual-use facility associated with Alcester Grammar School. When considered against the Sport England access standards the District performs well, with 52% of the population within a 20 minute drive of a quality assured leisure centre.

In rural communities there is a perceived need for improved community and recreation facilities demonstrated by Parish Plans. There are particular concerns that young people and those without a car have difficulties accessing leisure opportunities unless they are within the village itself. This is made worse by sparse public transport and a lack of evening services. Some villages lack designated space even for children's play or village events.

The provision and quality of recreation facilities and open space is maintained by the District Council's Sports and Leisure Service, the Grounds Maintenance Service, Town and Parish Councils, local community organisations (eg. sports clubs, village hall associations etc.) and private organisations. Parish Plans often seek to improve provision through small-scale community-led initiatives.

Local planning policy requires new residential schemes to provide on-site open spaces to meet residents' needs for children's play, youth and adult sport and informal use, or to pay a financial contribution towards local provision.

Warwickshire County Council's Countryside Access Team works to maintain and improve access to the countryside and rights of way. Their Improvement Plan identifies opportunities to develop a flagship trail between Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon along the River Avon for walkers and cyclists and to relaunch the existing section of the Avon Valley Way from Stratford to Marlcliff.

The District Council is currently undertaking an audit of recreation facilities and open space across the District, looking at quantity, quality and accessibility standards for each type of provision. This will allow the preparation of a Recreation and Open Space Investment Strategy to better direct the management of facilities by District Council services, and prioritise the spending of financial contributions by developers.

Consultation

The large majority (68%) of respondents to the Issues & Options document felt that it is important to improve leisure and cultural facilities in the District. The most noticeable theme was an emphasis on provision for young people. The other most popular categories of provision were green space and nature reserves, footpaths, cycle paths and country park areas (in both rural and urban areas) and swimming pools.

In terms of location, the most popular approach was to place more emphasis on local community facilities in all settlements including villages, with the benefits of funding local community-led projects emphasised. While only one response, relating to theatre, said that facilities should be concentrated in Stratford town, several said that the larger settlements were the most appropriate places to locate leisure and cultural facilities.

Sustainability Appraisal

Three discrete options were identified and have been assessed in relation to addressing the need for access for all to recreation facilities:

Option 1 - Provision of leisure facilities in accordance with a hierarchy of settlements: with extended facilities for leisure, culture and open space in Stratford-upon-Avon, a range of facilities in larger rural settlements, and small-scale, often community-led, provision in small rural settlements serving a rural catchment.

Option 2 - Focus on small-scale community-led provision in all settlements to a scale appropriate to meet the needs of the local community, but without additional resources targeted to larger centres.

Option 3 - Provision of some improved facilities in rural locations and small villages serving a significantly wider catchment than the local community.

It is considered that the following aspects of a strategic approach do not have any realistic alternatives on the basis of national policy or local circumstances:

- emphasis on the importance of recreation facilities and open space in supporting quality of life and sustainable development objectives in the District
- protection of existing recreation facilities and open space, and encouragement of improved provision, especially guided by a future Recreation and Open Space Strategy

- requirement that new development meets the recreation needs of all occupants, and a continuation/extension of developer financial contribution mechanism.

Justification of Preferred Option

Option 1 is identified as the preferred approach, while recognising that Option 2 also highlights the benefits of a community-led approach. The Preferred Option should therefore combine these benefits by provision of facilities based on the settlement hierarchy, while ensuring that a level of small-scale provision extends to all rural communities.

Option 1 is supportive of the service centre role of larger settlements and should allow access by sustainable transport providing that the walking, cycling and public transport networks to these centres are maintained and improved, including for weekend and evening use. It will allow a wider range of large-scale facilities, which will extend choice and provide opportunities for employment and for decentralised energy sources.

This approach is consistent with the Preferred Option identified for other local services.

The settlement hierarchy approach will be expanded by the intended Open Space and Recreation Audit which will allow the setting of specific local standards for quality, quantity and accessibility of recreation facilities and open space. The Audit will use information on existing provision and community need to inform standards which differentiate between different sizes of settlement and scale of facility.

In principle, major facilities which will attract large numbers of visitors from beyond the local areas will be located in Stratford-upon-Avon. A range of facilities to serve local residents and a rural catchment will be located in the main service centres. Rural communities will have facilities to meet the needs of local residents for open space and community events.

The Audit will lead to the preparation of a Recreation and Open Space Investment Strategy setting out local priorities to address identified deficits against the standards, which will be taken forward through planning and other services within the District Council.

Reasons for rejecting other options

There are no major disadvantages for Option 2. This Option performs particularly well in terms of objectives to increase community involvement in local projects and participation in decision-making. However, it did not provide many of the other identified benefits of Option 1, such as the opportunities to support the role of service centres and provide a more diverse range of facilities which will attract both residents and visitors.

Option 3 offers few benefits compared with the other options and has major disadvantages. It would lead to facilities in less sustainable locations which are not accessible to all residents and increase reliance on the private car. It is inconsistent with national and regional policy and detracts from the role of service centres. However, it should be recognised that this approach may have advantages for certain types of recreation provision, for example those based on an existing exceptional natural or historical feature. This could help spread the benefits of tourism across the District, particularly where this is an objective of the local community.

Policy CS.19

The scale and nature of recreation facilities will relate to the size and function of the individual settlement, based on its position in the settlement hierarchy as set out in Policy CS.1.

The provision of new or extended facilities and open spaces is supported, consistent with the purpose of the settlement hierarchy. Small-scale, community-led schemes are supported in all locations, where they have the backing of the local community.

It is expected that existing facilities will be retained. However, a proven lack of need for a facility may justify its change to another form of recreational use or to an alternative use.

New housing development is expected to provide increased or improved facilities for indoor and outdoor recreation, open space and green infrastructure to meet the needs of its future users.

Targets for provision across the District, and required standards of provision for new development, will be set out in a Supplementary Planning Document, informed by an Open Space and Recreation Audit. Priorities for provision through District Council services and developer contributions will be identified through an Investment Strategy for each local area.

There is a specific need to replace Stratford-upon-Avon's ageing Leisure Centre in the near future. Its physical condition and outdated design means that provision of a new facility should be promoted through the Core Strategy.

The Urban Design Framework for the town indicates, as part of its vision for the Bridgeway area, that the existing Leisure Centre could be relocated to allow for a major new cultural attraction on the site.

At this stage it has not been possible to identify a single preferred location should the Leisure Centre be relocated. As a result, three areas of land are put forward as having potential, although others may subsequently be identified. These are:

- North of Bishopton Lane
- West of Birmingham Road
- East of Shipston Road

These locations are shown on the Stratford-upon-Avon Proposals Map in Appendix B.

Any location for a new Leisure Centre will need to satisfy a number of factors, including:

- sufficient land to provide for the building, outside courts and car parking. A minimum site area of 2.5 hectares is required.
- accessible from within the town and to communities within its catchment, including by public transport
- scope to effectively minimise impact on the setting and character of the town.

Further technical assessment of these locations, together with responses to consultation on this Draft Core Strategy, will be used to inform a decision on which location, if any, to eventually promote. The mechanisms for delivering and funding a new Leisure Centre are also being considered.

Theme 3: Ensuring a responsible approach to resources

It is a fundamental tenet of planning for the future to ensure that resources are used carefully and efficiently due to their generally finite nature. This involves seeking more sustainable patterns of consumption and production. Development plans are expected to minimise the need to consume additional resources by making more efficient use or reuse of existing resources.

The Government sanctions the operation of the 'precautionary principle'. This requires the assessment of the costs and benefits of an action and transparency in decision-making. There are many aspects of the District's physical, natural and built characteristics that should be preserved. Their loss or an alternative use will have to be fully justified based on the wider interests of society.

Land

National and regional context

As part of its approach to delivering sustainable development, Government policy promotes the more efficient use of land through higher density, mixed use development and the use of suitably located previously developed land.³²

It also looks to protect best and most versatile agricultural land from development and states that where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, that of poorer quality should be preferred.³³

National policy guidance on mineral extraction is contained in a series of Mineral Planning Guidance notes. Minerals are an important national resource and their use makes an important contribution to the economic prosperity of the nation. Warwickshire is expected to contribute a fair share of minerals to meet national demand.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

Neither the current Community Plan nor the Council's new Corporate Strategy make a specific reference to land as a resource. However, both acknowledge that the environment of the District faces many pressures as a result of change and the need for new buildings and infrastructure. The Community Plan stresses the importance of ensuring that change occurs in such a way that adverse impacts are minimised.

³² Planning Policy Statement 1 Delivering Sustainable Development, para. 27 (viii) (2005)

³³ Planning Policy Statement 7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, para. 28 (2004)

Current situation

It has been calculated that about 8% of the land in Stratford District is developed in some form or another. The scale of housing and employment development currently proposed in the emerging RSS Revision for the District equates to only a further 0.25%. Nevertheless, it remains important to make sure that the amount of land used for development in the future is justified and necessary.

In terms of agricultural land, there is none of Grade 1 quality in Stratford District and only 9.6% is Grade 2, compared with 14.2% in England as a whole. There are no extensive swathes of higher quality agricultural land in the District, although there are pockets on the edges of certain settlements, such as Bidford-on-Avon, Stratford-upon-Avon and Wellesbourne.

It should be appreciated that most forms of agricultural activity and the extent to which land is used for active farming do not fall within the responsibilities or powers of the planning system.

Warwickshire County Council is the mineral authority and responsible for preparing a Minerals Plan. The current Minerals Local Plan was adopted in 1994 and is due to be updated. However, it identifies important mineral resources that need to be assessed, and possibly safeguarded, should they be affected by development proposals. In Stratford District these reserves are mainly in the form of sand and gravel (aggregates) along the main river valleys.

Consultation

The specific issue of land as a resource was not raised at the Issues & Options consultation stage. Nevertheless, it is considered to be an essential component of any approach to how limited resources are used.

A number of respondents did mention the need to protect land for specific purposes, such as the potential reinstatement of railways. Various concerns were expressed about the loss of land in urban areas to development and the impact that high density schemes can have on the character of an area. Interestingly, 83% of those who responded, thought that some forms of development should be allowed to take place in the countryside.

Sustainability Appraisal

No alternative approaches to this topic were identified for assessment either due to national policy or local circumstances.

Policy CS.20

The effective use of land is achieved through the following means:

- (a) ensuring that the maximum density of development is achieved in a way that is compatible with the character of the site and the adjacent area**
- (b) expecting mixed-use schemes to be promoted in situations where a particular range of uses can function in close proximity without causing undue harm to other occupiers**
- (c) maximising the use of suitably located previously developed sites for new uses in order to reduce the need for development on greenfield land**
- (d) avoiding, wherever possible, the use of best and most versatile agricultural land for development**
- (e) avoiding the use of land for development that has been identified as containing important mineral reserves**
- (f) protecting land safeguarded for specific infrastructure purposes from development that would prejudice the implementation of any such scheme.**

Open Spaces

National and regional context

National and regional policy highlights the importance of open spaces in achieving a wide range of social, economic and environmental objectives. The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Revision promotes green infrastructure (i.e. a connected network of green spaces and natural elements) for the role it can play in helping us to reduce the impact of and adapt to climate change.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

One of the key aims of the Community Plan is to get more people using and enjoying the countryside and open spaces for a range of leisure activities and pursuits. The Council's latest Corporate Strategy focuses on providing new public open spaces through the delivery of the current Local Plan proposals, although there is no reason why other opportunities should not come forward through the Local Development Framework.

Current situation

Much of the District is made up of attractive countryside, but this does not necessarily mean that communities have secure and unrestricted access to sufficient green space, even to the levels that are often found in urban areas. The value of open space for biodiversity, flood mitigation, etc. can vary greatly depending on its natural characteristics, its connection to other habitats and how it is managed.

Consultation

In the response to the Issues & Options consultation, the most frequently mentioned categories of leisure after youth provision, were green space and nature reserves, footpaths, cycle paths and country park areas (in both rural and urban areas).

Other sources of community consultation also demonstrate the importance of open space, access to nature and the countryside, and physical activity to residents of the District.

Sustainability Appraisal

No alternative approaches to this topic were identified for assessment either due to national policy or local circumstances.

Policy CS.21

Open spaces and other green infrastructure features are protected and enhanced for their contribution towards:

- (a) quality of life, healthy lifestyles and community cohesion**
- (b) biodiversity and provision of habitats**
- (c) sustainable transport methods**
- (d) mitigation of flooding, carbon sinks and other climate change impacts.**

Access to natural areas through nature reserves, rights of way, green corridors, country parks and connections between built up areas and the countryside will be maintained and improved.

Development of open space which is valuable for its contribution to the amenity and character of an area is resisted.

Renewable energy

National and regional context

The Government has set a national target for 10% of electricity supplies to come from renewable sources by 2010 and 15% by 2015. Having considered the resources of the West Midlands, the Regional Energy Strategy 2004 recommends a regional target of renewable generation equivalent to 5% of electricity consumption by 2010 and 10% by 2020.

PPS22³⁴ requires Local Development Documents to encourage and promote, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources. Policies should set out key criteria for assessing planning applications and should not rule out particular types of technology without good justification, as landscape and visual effects will vary case by case.

The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy Revision lists criteria against which renewable energy proposals should be judged, including landscape, impact on residents, traffic, community involvement, and the extent to which the proposal helps achieve wider environmental benefits including reduction of emissions and national targets for renewable energy generation.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan expects new development to be more efficient in the use of energy and resources. It also looks to the District to make use of energy from renewable sources. There is no specific reference to this issue in the District Council's new Corporate Strategy.

Current situation

In 2004, only 1.9% of energy consumed in the West Midlands region came from renewable sources, and the rate of increase is very slow. Most of the renewable energy schemes installed within Stratford District are very small scale, for example solar panels and wind turbines related to individual dwellings

Particularly due to the rural nature of our District, on-site community scale generation can offer the greatest benefits in terms of efficiency, reducing transmission losses and obtrusive transmission infrastructure, and enabling communities to have the direct benefits and control over design and location. Five adopted Parish Plans identify unreliable electricity and lack of mains gas as significant issue for the community. At Lighthorne Heath the community has worked with a local Housing Association to provide Ground Source Heating for new and existing properties in a village without mains gas.

Stratford District includes many Conservation Areas and part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, where it is important that any development, including renewable energy, does not compromise the objective of such designations. The Cotswolds AONB Conservation Board has issued guidance on renewable technologies it considers may be suitable, including information on suitable design, location and scale, which could be used to help assess such schemes³⁵.

Our townscapes and landscapes are highly valued by residents and visitors, not just in designated areas. Although each area has its own special features, the general character of the our landscape, with its gently rolling farmed countryside, scattered woodland, and rural settlements, is sufficiently similar to make many aspects of the Cotswolds AONB guidance relevant and applicable to the remainder of the District:

- Projects which are close to existing settlements where the impact of man-made structures are more prevalent will be more acceptable than projects in the open countryside where they create visual clutter.
- Large-scale wind turbines and wind farms may be detrimental to landscape, while building-mounted turbines may create intrusive clutter in groups of traditional buildings. Single or paired turbines scaled to meet the needs of a community, industrial, commercial or agricultural building may be most appropriate.
- Heatpumps are likely to be suited to the open setting of many rural buildings and once installed should have little visual impact. There are opportunities to locate biomass in existing buildings adjacent to woodland which will then benefit from management and avoid transporting wood fuels over long distances.
- Solar hot water and PVC can have low-visual impact where integrated well with buildings.
- Micro-hydro generation has been used historically in the area. A new turbine building can be carefully designed and sited to integrate with its setting while existing mills could be adapted to install the generating equipment.

Consultation

Most people who responded to the Issues & Options consultation document listed forms of renewable energy which they felt were appropriate for the District. By far the most commonly mentioned was solar panels either for hot water or electricity. Other common suggestions were wind turbines or wind farms and energy from waste. A few respondents pointed out that community scale generation can be more effective than microgeneration, and others highlighted the opportunities to work with communities on place-specific projects.

Concern was expressed about the impact of renewable energy, especially wind turbines and wind farms, on the District, due to visual/landscape impact, viability of development and impact on historic character.

A small number of respondents commented that nuclear is a more important source of energy than renewables, although they did not appear to suggest that this should be produced within the District. British Waterways expressed an interest in exploring ways to use water for heat control. Aston Martin and Jaguar expressed interest in providing on-site renewables on a large scale at Gaydon.

Sustainability Appraisal

The approach taken brings together the factors which need to be taken into account with reference to PPS22, the emerging RSS Revision, the evidence base information on climate change and renewable energy targets, work done by the Cotswolds AONB Management Board and the objectives of the Core Strategy. No reasonable alternative options were identified.

³⁵ Statement on Criteria for Renewable Energy Projects and guidance sheets on Forms of Renewable Energy for the Cotswolds AONB (Cotswolds Conservation Board) available to download from Position Statements and Renewable Energy sections on Publications page at <http://www.cotswoldsaonb.com>

Policy CS.22

Proposals for the use of renewable energy sources are encouraged, provided that the benefits of the scheme outweigh any detrimental impacts. The following factors are taken into consideration, according to the scale and nature of the scheme:

- (a) the extent to which the proposal helps achieve wider environmental benefits resulting from a reduction in carbon emissions and helps to achieve targets for renewable energy production**
- (b) impact on landscape character, visual amenity, historic features and biodiversity**
- (c) the likely traffic generation and the suitability of the local road network**
- (d) any unreasonable adverse impact on users and residents of the local area including the generation of emissions and noise**
- (e) the proximity of energy production to the end use and the impact of any required transmission equipment**
- (f) the extent to which there has been community involvement in developing the proposal and any direct benefits to the local area and community**
- (g) evidence that the scheme has been designed and sited to minimise any adverse impact on the surrounding area as far as is practical for its effective operation.**

Where the proposal will affect a Listed Building, Conservation Area or the Cotswolds AONB, the objective of designation must not be compromised by the development.

Within or adjacent to the Cotswolds AONB, large-scale wind and biomass schemes in particular are likely to be considered inappropriate.

[See also Policy CS.28 on Sustainable Design and Construction]

Flood risk and water management

National and regional context

National policy on this subject has become much clearer and stronger in recent years as a result of a number of damaging flood events. The aims of PPS25³⁶ are:

- to ensure that any potential risk is taken into account at all stages of the planning process
- to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding
- to direct development away from areas of highest risk. Where new development is necessary or justified in such areas, exceptionally, the policy aims to make it safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

The RSS Phase Two Revision is intending to include an overarching policy on climate change (Policy SR1). This states a requirement that development should avoid flood zones and also to protect essential infrastructure against flooding.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

One of the key objectives of the District Council's latest Corporate Strategy is to reduce the risk of flooding. It specifically states that planning policies will be used to minimise the number of properties at risk of flooding. The District Council will also work with partner agencies to seek to reduce the risk of flooding in high risk areas.

Current situation

Different parts of Stratford District and a wide range of communities are susceptible to the risk of flooding. There have been a number of recent flood events that had a widespread, damaging impact, most recently in July 2007. Quite rightly, the issue of flooding has become a priority and it is imperative that future development does not increase the level of risk.

The District Council has had a Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment produced. This maps all forms of flood risk and can be used to locate new development in low flood risk areas (Zone 1). Where development cannot be located in Flood Zone 1 due to the requirements to provide additional homes, jobs and facilities in accordance with the overall strategy, it is necessary to apply the 'sequential test'.

This process is a means of demonstrating that there are no reasonably available sites in areas with a lower probability of flooding that would be appropriate for the type of development or land use proposed.

If it is not possible to identify suitable alternative opportunities, the 'exception test' can be applied. This provides a method of managing flood risk while still allowing necessary development to take place. This may, in certain circumstances, justify development taking place in Flood Zone 2 (Medium Probability of Flood Risk) and Flood Zone 3a (High Probability of Flood Risk). A Flood Risk Assessment will be required to demonstrate that development in such zones will be safe, without increasing flood risk elsewhere and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.

In many areas extensive damage was caused by local surface-water flooding as much as river flooding. In response, the District Council has established Flood Drainage Forums bringing together key partners including the town and parish councils, Environment Agency, and water companies to identify actions that can be taken to reduce future flood risk. In this context, effective surface-water management and sustainable drainage is essential for all development.

Consultation

The response to the Issues & Options document confirmed the importance of making sure that the location of development is determined by the need to minimise flood risk. 96% of those who responded to the topic supported this approach.

Sustainability Appraisal

The District Council fully supports the approach provided in national policy and intends to apply it rigorously. There is no apparent justification for taking an alternative position on such an important and sensitive matter.

Policy CS.23

In considering all development proposals, the following principles are applied:

- (a) the expectation that all development should fall within Flood Zone 1 as defined in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment**
- (b) where land in Flood Zones 2 or 3a (as defined in the SFRA) is involved, a comprehensive Flood Risk Assessment will be required to be submitted by the applicant**
- (c) the need for a detailed assessment to inform site layout so that the most vulnerable elements of a development are in the lowest risk areas**
- (d) the need to build resilience into the design of development in order to reduce the impact of flooding**
- (e) the need to ensure that development is safe by providing people with a dry means of escape and effective access for emergency vehicles**
- (f) appropriate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs) and integrated surface water management measures are required to be included in all development**
- (g) opportunities will be sought where developer contributions can be used to fund flood risk management schemes.**

Natural features and landscape

International, national and regional context

The UK Government is a party to international agreements that seek to halt the decline of biodiversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio Earth Summit) was signed in 1992. In 2002, Heads of State at the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development committed themselves to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

National legislation also provides protection for certain wildlife species, habitats, geological sites and landscapes. One of the effects of the legislation is the definition of categories of site that are subject to protective measures. The most relevant category to Stratford-on-Avon District is SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). The District contains 37 SSSIs. However, it does not contain any of the SACs (Special Area of Conservation), SPAs (Special Protection Area) and Ramsar sites which denote international importance.

National policy in relation to biodiversity is summarized in 'Conserving Biodiversity – The UK Approach', published in October 2007 by DEFRA on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership. The document describes how the 'Ecosystem Approach' is a key underlying principle for the conservation of biodiversity. This approach aims to steer decision-making towards a greater sensitivity in relation to impacts on the natural environment.

The Government has also published the Biodiversity Strategy for England which sets out the means by which the Government will comply with its duty under Section 74 of the CROW Act to further the conservation of listed habitats and species. These include many that can be found within Stratford-on-Avon District.

Another statement of Government policy in relation to natural features comes in the form of "A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests"³⁷ which was published by DEFRA in June 2007.

PPS9³⁸ sets out key principles which should be followed by planning authorities to ensure that the potential impacts of planning decisions on biodiversity and geological conservation are fully considered.

At the regional level 'Restoring the Region's Wildlife' is the Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the West Midlands, published in 2005 by the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership. It is a guide for action over the five year period 2005-2009. The Landscape for Living Prospectus published by the WMBP provides a vision for managing and enhancing the natural environment at the landscape scale.

At the sub-regional level the Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan sets objectives, targets and actions for priority habitats and species. In many cases the actions include the incorporation of positive policies relating to habitat retention and enhancement within development plan documents.

On the issue of landscape outside AONBs, PPS7³⁸ promotes the use of criteria-based policies to protect these areas, backed up with landscape character assessment, while discouraging local landscape designations that may be used to unduly restrict sustainable development. Local designations should only be used where criteria-based policies cannot provide the necessary protection. Any such designation has to be based on formal and robust assessment of landscape qualities.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan has aims specifically relating to biodiversity:

- the number and variety of natural habitats will have increased and be in good condition
- more land area will be under environmental stewardship schemes
- there will be an on-going need to ensure the protection and enhancement of the District's natural environment.

The Community Plan also has an aim which states that the District will have a natural and built environment that is equally as attractive in 2015 as it is now.

The District Council's Corporate Strategy has 'a high quality environment' as a desired outcome and refers to the protection and maintenance of the District's varied green spaces as a priority.

Current situation

Natural features cover habitats, species, geological sites, trees and hedgerows and sees them as components of a wider landscape which in turn needs management to make the most of local distinctiveness. Previously, natural features have tended to be regarded as something separate from other issues and activities. However, it is increasingly the view that they are fundamental to people's wellbeing and prosperity. While individual sites and features will need protection and management, action is tending to focus on solving problems at the landscape scale in response to a greater appreciation of the challenges posed by climate change.

The evidence is showing some unfavourable trends notably:

- loss in the extent of some habitats, e.g. lowland neutral grassland, allotments, ponds, lakes and reservoirs, quarries and gravel pits
- decline in the quality of some habitats through a lack of appropriate management
- fragmentation and isolation of habitat through loss of links such as hedgerows
- veteran trees being left isolated and vulnerable through unsympathetic land management
- pressure on some types of habitat, e.g. infill development on mature gardens

³⁷ Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

³⁸ Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)

- decline in various species including farmland birds, invertebrates and plants that used to be typical of arable land
- in the longer term, climate change is likely to give rise to a change in the extent and condition of habitats and to the distribution of species.

On the other hand there are some positive trends, although their impact tends to be more marginal than the negative ones listed above:

- increase in the extent of some habitats, e.g. woodland and field margins
- at the national level there are signs that some species previously very limited in their distribution are on the increase
- the population index for woodland species in the West Midlands has increased by 59% since 1970
- high take-up of new agri-environment schemes is having a beneficial effect on habitats such as field margins and hedgerows.

On the whole the trends are heading in a negative direction and underline the need for the LDF to help re-direct them to a more favourable bearing. To assist this process it is important to provide resources to track trends in biodiversity on a long-term basis and bring this data into the decision making process. This will involve supporting a sufficient programme of surveys to identify local sites of nature conservation interest and sites of geological conservation interest.

The character of the Warwickshire landscape was last comprehensively assessed in the early 1990s. The results of this assessment were set out in the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines, published by Warwickshire County Council in 1993. It is necessary to ensure that information on landscape character is up to date and reflects recognized assessment methodologies, including those that measure the ability of the landscape to absorb change.

The Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterization project will add much to the original landscape assessment and will provide a much better understanding of the historic landscape resource and its capacity for change.

As regards landscape policy at the local level, the Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) defined in the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review had their origins in the early 1970s. Their retention in the Local Plan Review was based on their inclusion in the Warwickshire Structure Plan. However, the relevant policy in the Structure Plan (ER.4) no longer operates so the strategic justification for the SLAs has disappeared, the RSS making no direct reference to local landscape designations.

The District Council has not re-assessed the landscape qualities of the SLAs within the District because such a selective and limited study would have been at odds with the current approach to landscape assessment which seeks to recognize the intrinsic value and locally distinctive character of all landscape. Consequently, SLAs have not been defined in the LDF Core Strategy and there is no intention to define them in any other Development Plan Document (DPD).

Consultation

As regards natural features the Issues & Options consultation was relatively limited in scope, concentrating on whether more attention should be given to protecting and enhancing habitats. No questions were asked about species, geological sites, trees, hedgerows and the wider landscape. Nonetheless, a good number and range of responses was received.

The responses show a very clear majority in favour of doing more to protect and enhance wildlife habitat. It is evident that there is considerable public dissatisfaction with the current state of biodiversity in the District.

The need to prevent the loss of habitat-rich 'brownfield' land to development was emphasized, particularly in the case of mature gardens. Protection is also sought by means of the use of designations such as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs).

Enhancement of the nature conservation resource is sought by many with the idea of the strengthening and creation of green corridors and green infrastructure being popular. The role of development in facilitating the creation and management of wildlife habitat is seen as important by some respondents. Design needs to take on board biodiversity enhancement instead of maximising density.

The role of agriculture attracts attention. Some view agriculture in a critical light, while others see farmers as being willing partners in habitat enhancement, particularly if financial incentives are provided.

A cautionary note is sounded in some cases where respondents see natural features as something which should be balanced against other factors such as the needs of business.

Sustainability Appraisal

The options for natural features emerging from the consultation responses and from the evidence base relate to the degree to which the issue is embraced positively by the Core Strategy. The opinions and the data do not give any support for taking a do-nothing approach as regards biodiversity. Rather, the options can be characterized as follows:

Option 1 - Ensure that development does not contribute to a further net loss of natural features

Option 2 - Ensure that development contributes to a net gain of natural features.

Both of these options were subjected to the Sustainability Appraisal. Option 2 scored more highly than Option 1 against a range of factors and it is clearly evident that this is the approach that will more effectively contribute to achieving sustainable development within the District.

Justification for preferred option

In summary, Option 2 is selected as the preferred option because:

- it is closer to the intentions of international, national and regional policy
- it more closely reflects the views expressed during the Issues & Options consultation
- it will underpin the creation of high quality urban environments
- it will support the enhancement of biodiversity
- it will contribute more strongly to the mitigation of climate change effects.

Reasons for rejecting other Options

Option 1 is not selected as the preferred option because it would not harness the development process to produce enhancement of natural features. Retention of existing features is not enough when the current resource is the result of a long-term trend towards depletion. This relatively neutral approach would be an insufficient response to climate change and the opportunities presented by the development that the Core Strategy is aiming to facilitate.

Policy CS.24

The landscape of the District is valued for its local distinctiveness, historic character and for the ways it sustains biodiversity and geodiversity.

Proposals for development and changes in land use should strengthen these distinctive features. Where it is evident that a proposal which could have an impact on landscape character does not reflect this principle, then it is unlikely to receive support.

Proposals should aim to bring about a net gain in biodiversity by:

1. Safeguarding existing habitats, including:

- (a) those subject to national and international designations such as SSSIs in accordance with relevant national and EU policies**
- (b) those subject to local designations such as Local Wildlife Sites unless it can be demonstrated that alternative habitat can be provided and managed in the long term which has the potential to support a greater degree of biodiversity than that hosted by the existing site**
- (c) those not yet subject to formal designation but which are known to make a positive contribution to biodiversity, taking account of their current or potential role in networks of habitats across a wider area**
- (d) those which host species of principal conservation importance.**

2. Making provision, where appropriate, for measures that will secure the creation and management of additional habitats, to strengthen networks of habitats, to foster landscape scale conservation, to address the priorities of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and to support an increase in the local populations of species of principal importance.

Proposals which affect sites that contain features of geological interest need to safeguard these features on a similar basis to the approach to safeguarding wildlife habitats set out above, and with reference to the Local Geodiversity Action Plan when this is available.

Due to the relative scarcity of ancient semi-natural woodland and veteran trees, the onus is on those making development proposals that affect these natural features to make clear how they are to be safeguarded.

Proposals that will have an impact on other woodlands, hedges and trees should incorporate measures to recognize their contribution to landscape character, public amenity and biodiversity.

Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 ushered in a new era for AONBs. It gives extra strength to their status and aims to help secure their long term management. As a result, there is a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing AONBs. It also ensures that the physical character and quality of AONBs is an essential consideration in reaching decisions, including those relating to development proposals.

The Cotswolds AONB was originally designated in 1966 and its current boundary was confirmed in 1990. It includes most of the southern fringes of the District between Upper Quinton in the west and Warmington in the east. Its extent is illustrated on the Key Diagram. The Local Development Framework process does not provide an opportunity to revise this boundary.

A Management Plan has been prepared by the Cotswolds AONB Conservation Board. Again, the LDF is not the means by which the Management Plan can be amended; it is the responsibility of the Conservation Board to review it on a regular basis (at least every five years).

The primary purpose of AONBs is the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty which includes protecting flora, fauna and geological as well as landscape features, while the conservation of archaeological, architectural and vernacular features is also important.

AONB designation does not rule out all forms of development but the District Council is not prepared to permit schemes which would be detrimental to the character of the area. It is for architects and designers to put forward proposals which reflect an appreciation of, and sympathy for, the special character of the area.

Assessment of major development proposals within the AONB will include consideration against the criteria listed in PPS7 (para.27). These criteria relate to national interest, impact on local economy, alternative locations for schemes and detrimental effect on the environment and landscape.

The District Council's policy approach to development in the AONB has to be consistent with the purposes of its designation and the provisions of the Management Plan. As such, there is no requirement to consider other options.

Policy CS.25

The special qualities of those parts of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which lie within Stratford-on-Avon District are protected and, where opportunities arise, will be enhanced.

Development proposals should be founded on a high degree of sensitivity towards the natural beauty of the landscape and towards the special qualities and features that contribute to the distinctive character of the area. Proposals which would have a detrimental impact on the AONB are not permitted, whether located within the AONB or outside the designated area. Assessment of proposals also takes into account the potential cumulative impact of development, particularly in relation to the rurality and tranquillity of the area.

Sport and recreation facilities are acceptable if no adverse effect on the character of the area would be caused.

The impact of development proposals on the economic and social well-being of the area is taken into account, including the specific needs of agriculture.

Historic environment

National and regional context

The legislative framework for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment is in the process of change. The Government has published a Heritage Protection Bill which is to be taken through Parliament in the 2008/09 session, with enactment in the summer of 2009 and commencement of its powers in 2010. The Bill proposes a wholesale revision of the existing law that protects the historic environment, the individual features of which it describes as 'heritage assets'.

The law will still provide a strong basis for preventing unauthorized works to 'heritage structures', i.e. listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments as they are currently described. The legislation will also cover 'heritage open spaces', such as registered parks, gardens and battlefields, together with conservation areas and World Heritage Sites.

The legislation is not the only focus for change. Government guidance and policies on the historic environment are also being re-drafted. The two relevant Planning Policy Guidance notes, PPG15 and PPG16, are being brought together and revised in a new Planning Policy Statement (PPS), while English Heritage will be revising related guidance such as the principles used for selecting sites and buildings for inclusion on the register.

It is clear from PPS1 that the Government sees the preservation and enhancement of the built and archaeological heritage as an essential part of delivering sustainable development. The Local Development Framework is seen as needing to support this process by recognizing the social, environmental and economic value of the historic environment and its contribution to local distinctiveness, while a high level of protection should be given to the most valued townscapes and landscapes. At the same time the Government regards the LDF as a means of carrying forward a proactive agenda which includes identifying opportunities for the regeneration and enhancement of the historic environment. The new PPS will no doubt elaborate on these themes.

English Heritage has published 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment'. These principles underline, inter alia, the need for people to participate in sustaining the historic environment, the need to understand the significance of places and that significant places should be managed to sustain their value. At the detailed technical level, English Heritage publishes advice on such matters as the re-use of traditional farm buildings, micro-generation in the historic environment and the investigation and recording of historic buildings.

At the regional level the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy seeks to protect historic landscape features and built heritage. Policy QE5 lists a range of features that are seen as being of particular historic significance, not just buildings and monuments but also rural landscapes, settlement patterns, strategic river corridors including the River Avon and the historic transport network. Again, there is an emphasis on the regeneration potential of different features such as industrial and commercial buildings that have become redundant, rural settlements and market towns, traditional rural buildings and the canal network. The RSS also highlights the need for an increased understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment, and the need to protect the resource from insensitive change, exploitation or detrimental visitor pressure whilst enhancing its contribution to local character and distinctiveness. These policies will be subject to the RSS Phase Three Revision process.

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

A strong message relating to the historic environment is conveyed by the Community Plan: the history and heritage that makes the Stratford District unique must be protected. The plan seeks a built environment in 2015 that is equally attractive as it is now. An action sought by the plan is the designation of the historic core of Stratford-upon-Avon as a World Heritage Site.

The District Council's latest Corporate Strategy does not contain aims, outcomes or priorities that relate directly to the historic environment, although it does refer to 'maintaining and enhancing the heritage' in the overall vision for the District. The latter is articulated in more detail in the 'vision' documents for Alcester, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam and Stratford-upon-Avon.

Current situation

Well known for its connections with William Shakespeare, Stratford District has a rich historic heritage which includes 75 conservation areas, over 3,000 listed buildings and 86 scheduled ancient monuments. It also contains 11 parks and gardens included in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, while the site of the Battle of Edgehill is included in the Register of Historic Battlefields.

Many historic features in the District have not achieved national recognition. There is no comprehensive catalogue of all these assets. Some may have been noted in conservation area appraisals, parish plans, village design statements or in the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Some buildings and monuments may have the potential to be given a national designation but have not yet been through the assessment process. This is particularly the case with archaeological remains because scheduling has only covered a relatively small sample of sites which could meet the criteria for scheduling.

A partial indication of the condition of the historic environment in the District is given in English Heritage's 'Heritage at Risk' Register which lists historic features that are vulnerable through neglect and decay. The Register is limited in its scope and has yet to be completed. As regards Grade I and Grade II* listed buildings in the District, three have been included in this Register. This represents just over 1% of the total number, a figure which indicates that almost all of the most significant historic buildings of the District are subject to good guardianship and the situation compares well with the

national figure of 3.2%. In fact a high proportion of the Grade I and II* listed buildings are ecclesiastical and therefore fall outside the scope of the current listed building legislation. Of the 3000+ Grade II listed buildings in the District, no "Heritage at Risk" assessment has yet been undertaken, so the English Heritage information only covers a small fraction of the overall resource.

As for scheduled ancient monuments, a very different picture is painted by English Heritage's recent 'Monuments at Risk' survey. In the West Midlands Region, 21% of monuments have general management problems, while 12% are in a wholly unsatisfactory condition, 26% are in a declining condition and only 9% are improving. Of the counties in the region, Warwickshire has the highest number (34) of monuments at high risk under arable cultivation, while in the region as a whole 25% of monuments are at risk from agriculture. This reflects the fact that the majority (59%) are earthwork sites such as burial mounds, hillforts, moated sites and motte castles.

By comparison, only a very small proportion (2%) of monuments are regarded as being at risk from the threat of development, so reversing this picture of decline will have much to do with changes in land management and grant allocation for restoration, rather than changes in protection afforded through the development planning and control processes. Registered parks and gardens and battlefields (to be known in future as 'heritage open spaces') have also been assessed as to whether they are 'at risk'. National figures indicate that 7% of these locations are at 'high risk'. More local figures are not available.

The District's conservation areas are currently subject to a comprehensive programme of review that will take a number of years to complete. The latest appraisal, that for Alcester, was adopted by the District Council in September 2008. The appraisals are examining issues which include the validity of the current conservation area boundaries, the degree to which recent development has affected the character and appearance of the conservation areas, which structures, buildings and streets are most valued, and how the areas can be improved.

At the sub-regional level, the Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) project, which aims to digitally map the present historic character of the county's landscape, is currently being undertaken by the Warwickshire Museum Field Service and funded by English Heritage. It will provide a better understanding of the historic landscape resource and its capacity for change. It will be complete in 2009, but HLC information has already been made available to assist in assessing the environmental impact of proposals through the Core Strategy process. A similar study has already been undertaken in the Cotswolds AONB including that part which falls within Stratford-on-Avon District.

Also utilising English Heritage funding, the Museum Field Service will be embarking upon an 'Extensive Urban Survey' of the county's historic towns as part of a national programme of surveys of the archaeology, topography and historic buildings of the smaller historic towns of England. Additionally, the Museum Field Service will be undertaking a Historic Farmstead Characterisation project as part of a regional study to better understand their landscape context and characteristics of farmsteads in the county, with a view to compiling guidelines to assist the assessment of proposals for the future use of these buildings.

Consultation

The Issues and Options document concentrated debate on whether or not it was important to protect all historic buildings and archaeological remains. The response favoured a pragmatic approach with an acceptance that decisions would have to take into account the quality and significance of each building and monument. Some respondents thought there would be scope in certain cases for a programme of investigation and recording to be a sufficient means of recognizing the historic significance of a site rather than long-term preservation.

There is also acceptance that development can be compatible with, and also promote, the protection and enhancement of the historic heritage. On the other hand, there is a minority view that seeks the protection all historic features in all circumstances as each is part of the legacy of our ancestors.

Sustainability Appraisal

Within the context of current national legislation and policy, an option based on the application of blanket protection for historic features would not be tenable. The approach set out below provides a strong measure of continuity from previous policy while reflecting elements from the emerging national legislative framework and recognizing the importance of the current HLC project.

Policy CS.26

Historic landscape character should be fully taken into account when proposals for development and changes in land use are being designed or assessed. In particular, the understanding gained through the Warwickshire Historic Landscape Characterisation and related programmes should be used to ensure that proposed development and change enhances historic landscape character and avoids detrimental effects on patterns and features which make a significant contribution to the character, history and setting of a settlement or area.

Where proposals are being drawn up for development which could affect individual heritage assets, the initial aim should be to obtain sufficient information to provide a full understanding of the context, characteristics and significance of the asset. Schemes must then be designed in accordance with sound conservation principles, including the need to take into account any potential impact on the setting of a heritage asset. Any such development proposal will be assessed against sound conservation principles. This informed and sensitive approach to design should be taken even if the asset is considered to be of local interest only, taking into account the extent to which it is valued by the local community.

Where appropriate, opportunities should also be taken to assist people's understanding of the history of the asset by such measures as permitting public access and the provision of interpretation displays. This will be particularly important if the asset has relevance to the District's special contribution to the nation's literary history.

A programme of conservation area review will be carried out and will consider further designations in the light of amended legislation and national guidance. It will be especially mindful of the need for conservation areas and their settings to be enhanced as well as preserved.

Theme 4: Achieving high standards of development

Looking to achieve high quality forms of development is not an optional extra. It is essential that development is sensitive to and reflects the character of its surroundings. The key aspect of good design is that it complies with the distinctive qualities of the area. Design that reflects the local area is likely to make a significant contribution towards making sure that development is acceptable and sustainable.

A critical aspect of development is the way in which it incorporates means of reducing energy consumption and achieves the efficient use of resources, including construction materials and water.

Layout and design

National and regional context

National policy on design is set out in PPS1³⁹ and a range of companion publications. It sees good design as incorporating a wide range of features:

- connecting people and places by considering their need to gain access to jobs and key services
- integrating development into the existing urban form and the built environment
- being part of the process for ensuring successful, safe and inclusive communities
- creating an environment where everyone can benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society
- considering the direct and indirect impacts of development on the natural environment.

The emerging RSS Revision does not cover this issue other than in respect to development achieving the highest possible environmental standards (see next section).

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan aspires to achieve a District that is equally as attractive in 2015 as it is now. High quality environment and the need to reduce the fear of crime are key priorities.

It expects new development to be more efficient in the use of energy and resources, including the use of renewable energy, and energy efficiency measures to have been installed in all dwellings in the District.

³⁹ Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

The current Corporate Strategy does not cover this issue specifically although many of its aims are dependent on the nature of development proposals to help achieve them, such as access to services, reducing crime and a high quality environment.

Current situation

The design of development brings together various elements that affect the quality of life in a settlement such as public/private space, landscape, crime, noise and community relations. Good design should be about creating an enriched environment for people to live, work and visit.

The individual settlements and landscapes across our District have their own distinctive character which has evolved through their historical development and management. They are highly valued by our generation. This distinctiveness is what defines a place and is often the key attraction of an area. The need to have regard to the character and quality of the local area and respect local distinctiveness is a fundamental principle underlying the District Council's design policies set out in the current Local Plan and the District Design Guide.

However, certain aspects of recent development tend to conflict with and threaten the established character of our towns and villages. The District Council is particularly concerned about high density development that is unsuitable in many locations and the loss of gardens.

Climate change is an issue of global and local significance. The design of individual buildings and the layout of new development can make an important contribution towards reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption and increasing the use of renewable energy sources. The District Council has recently published guidance on how it will expect new development to respond to this challenge.⁴⁰

Consultation

Almost all respondents to the Issues & Options document wanted to see high quality design of development that is sympathetic to the character of the area. A number mentioned the importance of heritage and the historic assets of an area influencing the approach to design.

Concern was expressed about the impact of high density development. But it was also recognised by some respondents that innovation and the use of modern materials is appropriate in some circumstances.

A clear message was given about the need for design to incorporate sustainability measures such as energy efficiency and supply. The need for public involvement in the design process was also expressed.

Sustainability Appraisal

It is difficult to base an assessment on what constitutes good design and not particularly fruitful to put forward alternative approaches relating to good and bad design or various forms of design.

Government policy expects planning authorities to achieve high quality design in all development. There is no basis for questioning the need for this approach or for pursuing alternative courses of action. For these reasons no other option has been considered.

Policy CS.27

All forms of development are expected to be of high quality and reflect the distinctive character of the locality. The approach taken to design should ensure that the development is:

- (a) sustainable – the inclusion of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy sources, the use of local materials and effective water management is imperative [also see Policy CS.28 below]**
- (b) adaptable – a building should be flexible enough to allow changes to be made to meet the needs of the occupier**
- (c) distinctive – the wider locality sets the context and there should be a continuity of key design features that establishes the identity of the place**
- (d) innovative – in certain circumstances it is appropriate to be creative and not have to apply rigid standards or styles to layout and appearance**
- (e) protective – buildings and features of historic, architectural and ecological importance should be protected in order to preserve the heritage and biodiversity of the area**

- (f) accessible – all people need to be able to get into and use a building and it should be capable of being reached by all practical modes of transport**
- (g) safe – effective measures should be incorporated to help reduce crime and the fear of crime and to minimise danger from traffic**
- (h) connected – the layout should create and enhance networks of green infrastructure for public and biodiversity benefit across the site and the wider area, protect existing rights of way, and connect with off-site foot and cycle routes.**

Sustainable design and construction

International, national and regional context

The Kyoto protocol commits the UK to reducing its carbon emissions to 12.5% below 1990 levels by 2008-12, and the Climate Change Bill sets a national target to reduce carbon emissions to 26-32% below 1990 levels by 2020.

The Climate Change Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 states that local authorities should require a proportion of energy used in new development to come from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon energy. They should expect new development to use layout, landform and building orientation to minimise carbon dioxide emissions and give priority to the use of sustainable drainage, including water harvesting and recycling. Planning policies should not deter innovative design except in exceptional circumstances. When selecting land for development, locations should be assessed against a range of sustainability criteria including opportunities for renewable energy production, and for open spaces contributing to biodiversity, sustainable drainage, and urban cooling.

Changes to Building Regulations will result in increases to minimum standards of energy performance in dwellings equivalent to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 in 2010, Level 4 in 2013 and Level 5 in 2016. The Government intends to prepare a similar timeline for all non-domestic buildings to be zero-carbon by 2019.

Policy SR3 in the emerging RSS Phase two Revision requires that all new buildings are designed and constructed to the highest possible environmental standards and sets specific minimum standards to be applied by local authorities in their local development documents and when determining planning applications.

The standards set out in the Draft Revision use recognised national and West Midlands-based assessment methods and include energy efficiency and water conservation standards (based on the Code for Sustainable Homes, BREEAM offices scale⁴¹ and Building Regulations), together with the promotion of sustainable sources of materials for all new development. For larger schemes they relate to overall layout and design (through use of the West Midlands Sustainability Checklist), sustainable drainage, surface water management, provision of at least 10% energy demand through on-site renewable energy production and promotion of other decentralised energy systems. All residential schemes should follow the CAGE Building for Life standard. Local authorities may set more demanding targets where considered appropriate.

Since 2008, the Housing Corporation requires new homes to meet a minimum of Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes to be eligible for a Social Housing Grant. From 2012, Level 4 will be required, with a view to requiring Level 6 from 2015.

Community Plan/ Corporate Strategy

The Community Plan aims for all new developments to be more efficient in the use of energy and resources, and for all existing buildings to install some energy efficient measures. The Corporate Strategy aims to reduce the District Council's carbon footprint in relation to its own building and vehicles.

Current situation

In 2003, domestic energy consumption accounted for just under a third of final energy consumption in Warwickshire. Industry and commerce accounts for a further 28%. Projected emissions reductions based on recent trends in Warwickshire would be about a 13% reduction by 2050 compared to Kyoto target of 60%, so it is clear that action needs to be taken to reduce domestic and commercial energy use.

⁴¹ The Buildings Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) for offices is a widely used means of reviewing and improving the environmental performance of office buildings

Stratford District is in the Severn water-supply zone, where demand is already too close to supply to allow for the required buffer. A study conducted for the RSS revision process concludes that the zone is at high risk of going into deficit of water supply based on the proposed housing allocations. If all new dwellings were to be built to use a maximum of 105 litres/person/day (as required by Levels 3 and 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes), this would have a significant impact on the size and duration of the deficit.

The adopted District Local Plan requires all planning applications to show how sustainability issues have been taken into account. All dwellings and non-residential development over 100m² must incorporate renewable energy to reduce the overall predicted carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10%. A low threshold was considered appropriate for Stratford District because a comparatively high proportion of new development comes from small scale schemes and because a threshold of 10 dwellings is likely to miss schemes for replacement dwellings (often large detached houses where renewable energy is not difficult to incorporate), infill sites, and rural sites (where several forms of renewable energy are often highly effective because of the space available and the poor coverage of mains gas supply).

The District Council's recently adopted Sustainable Low-Carbon Buildings SPD requires all new homes to be constructed to Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. This is required by the Housing Corporation on all homes receiving a Social Housing Grant, and the Council believes it is important to create a level playing field for standards across affordable and market housing.

Any policy requirements should ensure that development remains viable. Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes requires dwellings to reduce their energy performance by 25% compared to 2006 Building Regulations, in addition to incorporating water efficiency and other sustainability features. A detailed national study⁴² suggests that achieving Level 3 of the Code will add 5-6% onto the building costs of a detached house in a range of scenarios where 10% renewable energy is provided as part of the energy efficiency measures.

A study conducted to inform the South-West Regional Spatial Strategy⁴³ concluded that currently a 44% reduction in energy use (Level 4), and from 2011 a 100% reduction (Level 5), is currently technically and economically viable on schemes of 10 dwellings or more.

It should be noted that meeting the minimum energy standards at each level of the Code is by far the most significant building cost, while meeting Level 3 of the energy section from 2010 and Level 4 from 2013 will be mandatory under Building Regulations. The additional costs to achieve a full rating across the Code is estimated to be from 0.3% up to 2% of total building costs for any type of dwelling.

Consultation

The vast majority (98%) of respondents to the Issues and Options document agreed that new development should be designed to produce significantly lower carbon emissions than at present.

The most frequently mentioned measures were:

- Energy efficient design and improved building standards
- Renewable energy in new development
- Reducing car use
- Increased recycling
- Reducing water use.

Sustainability Appraisal

Three discrete options were identified for assessment:

Option 1: Encourage energy efficiency, renewable energy, water efficiency, sustainable drainage and sustainable construction practice, but do not require specific standards or the attainment of levels against national codes. Changes to Building Regulations will result in increases to minimum standards of energy performance equivalent to level 3 in 2010, level 4 in 2013 and level 5 in 2016.

Option 2: Require new development to meet the standards set out in Policy SR3 'Sustainable Design and Construction' in the RSS Phase Two Revision Draft Preferred Option.

⁴² Cost Analysis of the Code for Sustainable Homes Final Report, DCLG (July 2008)

⁴³ Supporting and delivering zero carbon development in the South West; Final Technical Report (Prepared for South West Regional Assembly by Faber Maunsell and Peter Capener, (January 2007)

Option 3: Require new development to meet the standards set out in RSS Policy SR3, with a lower threshold of 1 dwelling or 100m² of non-residential floorspace for applying a 10% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Require new dwellings to achieve Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and Level 4 from 2012, rather than only specifying requirements for the energy and water sections.

It is considered that the following aspects of a strategic approach do not have any realistic alternatives on the basis of national policy or local circumstances:

- In accordance with paragraphs 41 and 42 of the Climate Change Supplement to PPS1 and Policy EN2 Energy Conservation of the emerging RSS Revision, all development will be expected to take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption.
- Development on allocated sites is expected to be built to the highest possible standards of sustainable construction, water management and energy efficiency with regard to site-specific opportunities.

Justification of Preferred Option

Based on the assessment, Option 3 is chosen because it will improve the standard of new development by ensuring that policy is applied effectively and consistently. Both Options 2 and 3 give substantial benefits on a wide range of social, economic and environmental sustainability criteria.

The SA identifies that requiring development to achieve the Code for Sustainable Homes gives a robust framework for encouraging several aspects of sustainability, such as sustainable sourcing of materials, avoidance of polluting materials, recycling facilities, cycle storage, and user manuals for residents.

The reduced threshold for renewable energy should result in a considerable increase in the number of dwellings and non-residential developments incorporating renewable energy features. Applying the policy to a lower threshold will catch large replacement dwellings and rural sites, and is likely to generate local demand for renewable technology and skills from local businesses which could in turn lead to a local growth in a desirable high value economic sector.

An SPD should be prepared explaining how the policy will be implemented within the District, ensuring the policy is sufficiently flexible to allow solutions appropriate to site circumstances.

Reasons for rejecting other options

Option 2 would have similar impacts to Option 3, but would not have the additional benefits resulting from the additional aspects of the Code for Sustainable Homes and from renewable energy on small-scale development.

Option 1 is contrary to national and regional policy as it fails to ensure that new development will be built to improved standards. It is unlikely to improve the environmental impact of new development as not all applicants will choose to comply.

Policy CS.28

All development is expected to take account of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption.

The following criteria are also applied:

- (a) All applications for development of 10 or more dwellings or 1000m² or more of non-residential floorspace should demonstrate that at least the 'good' standards, and wherever possible the 'best practice' standards are achieved for each category of the West Midlands Sustainability Checklist for Development.**
- (b) All new dwellings should achieve at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, and from 2012 should achieve at least Level 4. This will involve meeting or exceeding the minimum standards for water and energy efficiency at this level as well as achieving additional points across a range of sustainability categories.**
- (c) Developments of 100m² or more non-residential floor space, and all new dwellings, should incorporate renewable energy production equipment to reduce the overall predicted carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10%. The criteria set out in Policy CS.22 will be used when considering whether a renewable energy scheme is appropriate to the location of the proposed development.**

(d) All new development should demonstrate good water efficiency standards. Meeting or exceeding the minimum water conservation standard of Level 3 and 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes will demonstrate this for new dwellings. Other developments should demonstrate efficiency savings of at least 25%.

Additional guidance on the implementation of this policy will be provided in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document.

[Improvements to existing buildings are encouraged through Policy CS.11 on stewardship of existing housing stock; Sustainable drainage and surface water management is required through Policy CS.23 on flood risk and water management.]

Control of pollution

National and regional context

The Government acknowledges that new development can have an impact on the environment and property through its potential to pollute. Furthermore, opportunities for new development can be constrained by existing pollution. The overall aim of planning and pollution control policies is to ensure the sustainable and beneficial use of land. Within this aim, polluting activities that are necessary for society and the economy should be positioned and subject to controls in order to minimise their adverse effects and contain them within acceptable limits.

Much environmental pollution, resource depletion and social cost occurs because those responsible are not those who have to deal with the consequences. As a result, the principle of making the polluter pay is now ingrained in national policy. If the polluter, or ultimately the consumer, is made to pay for these impacts, it gives an incentive to reduce harm and means that costs do not fall on society at large.

Other legislation and compliance systems complement land-use planning by controlling the operation of those activities that have the potential to cause damage. Planning and the environmental protection regimes are expected to complement rather than duplicate each other, although there is a lack of clarity about where responsibilities lie in some respects.

PPS23⁴⁴ covers the topic of planning and pollution control and PPG24⁴⁵ deals specifically with the issue of noise.

The emerging RSS Revision contains a policy on improving air quality in relation to sensitive ecosystems (Policy SR4).

Community Plan/Corporate Strategy

Neither makes a specific reference to the issue of pollution control, although it is clearly an important aspect of securing a high quality environment which is identified as a key objective in both.

Current situation

Potentially polluting industrial processes were made the subject of an Integrated Pollution Control system, introduced by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, that split responsibility for the control of such processes between the Environment Agency and District Councils. The former regulates certain industrial processes that have the greatest potential for causing environmental harm whilst the District Council's regulatory system covers other smaller scale industrial processes with air pollution potential.

The quality of air in urban areas is the cause of considerable public concern due to the possible effect on health. Under the Environment Act 1995, responsibility for air quality, as opposed to air pollution, was left entirely in the hands of District Councils, although strategy is decided at national level. In Stratford District, the main source of air pollution is road traffic. Monitoring has identified a small number of areas in the District where air quality does not meet national standards. These are concentrated in the centres of Stratford-upon-Avon, Henley-in Arden and Studley. The latter was declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2006 and the District Council is currently considering whether to also designate the whole of central Stratford and part of Henley as AQMAs.

There has been increasing concern nationally and locally about the extent of lighting in relation to a development. Excessive illumination of a site can have a major impact on the local area and on the enjoyment of the night sky, particularly in open countryside. It can also be detrimental to residential amenity and, in more extreme situations, a statutory nuisance.

⁴⁴ Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

⁴⁵ Planning Policy Guidance Note 24: Planning and Noise (1994)

The standard applied to lighting proposals is based on the Environmental Zone that the development falls into. There are four zones as defined by the Institute of Lighting Engineers⁴⁶. These are:

E1: Intrinsically dark landscapes - National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, etc.

E2: Low district brightness areas - Rural, small village, or relatively dark urban locations

E3: Medium district brightness areas - Small town centres or urban locations

E4: High district brightness areas - Town/city centres with high levels of night time activity.

In a rural area such as Stratford District, agriculture forms an important part of the local economy. Modern farming practices can have a polluting effect, such as may arise when the effluent from intensive animal rearing is not properly managed.

The District Council is active in ensuring close co-operation between the various agencies in assessing the potential pollution effects of proposed development. This also covers the extent to which any impact can be mitigated through appropriate design and construction, as well as through the ongoing regulation of the processes that the development supports.

Consultation

Pollution control was not raised in the Issues & Options document but it is considered sufficiently important to be covered in the Core Strategy as it is fundamental to maintaining the quality of our environment and the health of our residents.

Sustainability Appraisal

The District Council fully supports the Government's commitment to the precautionary principle. This should be applied where there is good reason to believe that harmful effects may occur to human, animal or plant health, or to the environment. It is therefore particularly pertinent to the issue of pollution.

There is no apparent justification for taking an alternative position on such an important issue that is the source of significant public concern.

Policy CS.29

Planning permission is not granted for development if it is likely to cause levels of air, noise, light or water pollution or soil contamination that would be harmful to other land uses, human health or the natural environment.

The effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures for overcoming or minimising the impact of development is fully taken into account.

Within or close to a declared Air Quality Management Area, development is not permitted unless it can be demonstrated that pollution levels, if any, would be consistent with the objectives and/or targets of an Action Plan and would not lead to unacceptable air quality.

Where planning permission is granted, conditions and/or planning obligations will be attached to ensure that the appropriate standards are secured in order to protect the local environment and the amenity of residential properties.

Theme 5: Implementing and monitoring the Strategy

At the outset it should be stressed that the social, economic and environmental effects of the policies in the Core Strategy have been assessed through a Sustainability Appraisal to determine their contribution towards sustainable development. On that basis, they should be implemented rigorously if the Core Strategy is to be effective in achieving its overarching objectives.

Implementation process

The District Council will take a realistic approach to the implementation of the Core Strategy. It will ensure that schemes that are approved are legally, practically and technically feasible in the short, medium and long term. It accepts that there are some schemes which by their nature and cost may take time to implement. Where this is the case their relationship with the rest of the Core Strategy will be clearly established. There are other proposals whose implementation might be sensitive for which the Council will seek to ensure that there is adequate consultation and engagement.

The Core Strategy will be incomplete if its path to implementation is unclear. PPS12⁴⁷ is clear about the importance of delivery and monitoring and one of the key tests of soundness of the Core Strategy is providing evidence to test its delivery mechanisms. The implementation of the policies of the Core Strategy will be undertaken by the private, public and voluntary sectors. However, the District Council recognises that a significant part of the direct investment in land, buildings and infrastructure will be made by the private sector.

Having said that, the public sector also invests significant resources in infrastructure provision to create the necessary environment for sustainable development and that role should not be under-estimated. For example, the Supplementary Planning Document on 'Developer Contributions towards Transport Schemes in Stratford-upon-Avon' identifies a number of transport schemes with a total cost of implementation estimated to be £8.85m. Of this figure, the public sector is contributing £5.59m compared with the private sector contribution of £2.01m. Furthermore, the public sector invests a lot of resources in the maintenance of the infrastructure once provided.

The direct investment in land, buildings and infrastructure will mostly be made by the private sector. To complement this, the public sector agencies will look to create the right environment for communities to thrive, including transport infrastructure and pedestrian improvement schemes. The implementation of the Core Strategy will therefore require a co-ordinated effort in which the District Council and other public agencies such as the County Council will be taking a proactive role. In this regard, the District Council will be encouraging a partnership approach towards implementation. Co-operative working through the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement will assist this process.

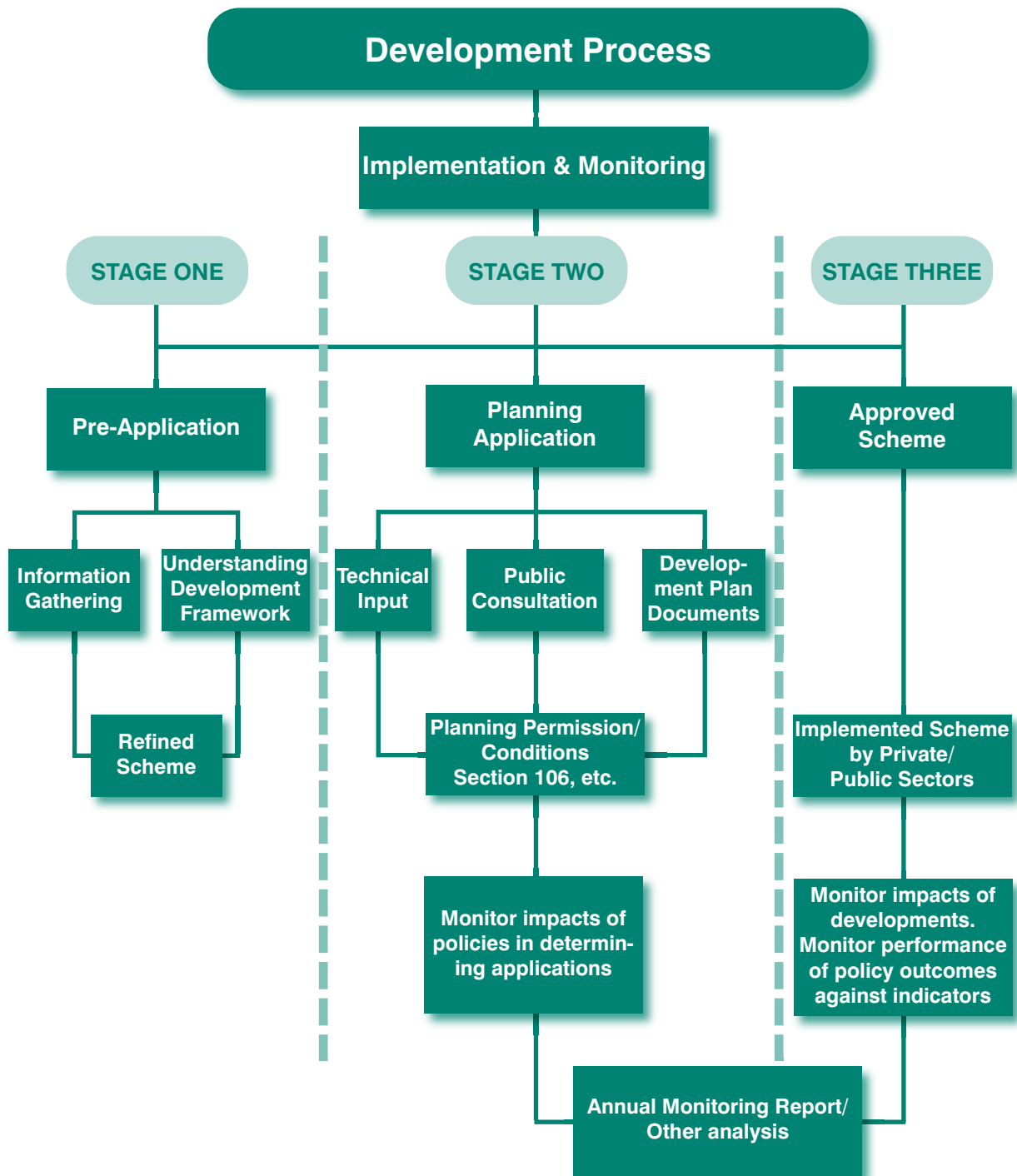
A major aspect of implementing the Core Strategy is the process of determining planning applications for which the District Planning Authority has the primary role to play. This process, and the manner in which development proposals are assessed, is set out in the diagram.

The District Planning Authority will take a proactive role in pre-application discussions and negotiations to ensure that developers are fully informed of its expectations, in particular the development framework within which the suitability of their schemes will be measured. It is expected that this initial exchange of information and negotiations before a planning application is submitted will lead to a refined scheme and help to minimise delays in the planning process. The impact of pre-application discussions on the quality of planning applications will be monitored for their effectiveness in achieving this objective.

In considering a planning application, the District Planning Authority will seek to ensure that it includes all the necessary technical supporting information to inform the decision-making process. This is considered vital to assessing development impacts and appropriate mitigations measures, including supporting infrastructure that may be necessary to enable the development to function in a sustainable manner. There is no doubt that the quality of information provided has a direct impact on the quality of the decision.

We will also seek to ensure that the general public is adequately consulted in accordance with the provisions of the Statement of Community Involvement in order to gain full understanding of public views on a proposal. The significance of local information gained through these forms of local community consultation cannot be over-emphasised.

It is expected that the outcome of this process will be good quality schemes that will meet the needs and requirements of the District with a complementary set of conditions, infrastructure support, Section 106 Agreements and mitigation measures. It will also lead to an understanding of when different elements of a proposal should be implemented.



Planning Obligations

The need for development to be supported by adequate and appropriate infrastructure is paramount. Development often has impacts and it is therefore fair and reasonable that developers contribute towards schemes that are designed to mitigate these impacts and/or enable the development to function in a sustainable manner. However, Circular 05/2005 requires developer contributions to be sought only where the following criteria are met and the District Council will ensure that they are applied. The contributions must be:

- necessary
- relevant to planning
- directly related to the proposed development
- fair and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development
- reasonable in all other aspects.

The conventional approach to securing developer contributions in the District has been based on negotiations. This approach has been criticised for being inconsistent and often involves lengthy negotiations. The Council is increasingly moving towards a tariff-based approach to developer contributions which it believes is fair, transparent, simple and justified. Such an approach has been applied successfully to transport and open space contributions in recent years and it is expected that it will be extended to other areas of community infrastructure.

A range of Guidance Notes and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) has already been prepared to provide detailed guidance on the planning application process, design and sustainability requirements for development, Planning Obligations and how to secure developer contributions towards transport, affordable housing and open space infrastructure.

The Council has also set up a comprehensive database system to monitor Section 106 Agreements and how contributions made are being used to support development.

Policy CS.30

All development proposals are required to provide or contribute to the provision of facilities, infrastructure and services, and other forms of environmental and social requirements that are necessary to make a scheme acceptable in planning terms.

It is expected that all forms of development will achieve a net benefit to the local community taking into account its needs and aspirations.

The nature and scale of any planning obligations sought for this purpose is related to the type of development and its potential impact on the area.

Community Infrastructure Levy

The Government has introduced provisions in the Planning Bill for a new form of development charge known as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Its aim is to establish a more effective way of increasing investment in vital infrastructure that communities need. As the Government's proposals continue their passage through the parliamentary process, the District Council will be examining the relative effectiveness of the CIL approach in providing community infrastructure, taking into account the geography and needs of our area.

The outcome of this assessment could determine the future direction of planning obligations in the District. It should be noted that, as things stand, local authorities would not be obliged to adopt the CIL but could choose to retain the current planning obligations arrangements.

Phasing

The District Council will take a pragmatic but robust approach to the phasing of development. Key influential drivers to determining the suitability of phasing to specific projects will be the sustainability objectives of the Core Strategy, the outcome of monitoring and the scale and complexity of the schemes. Phasing may apply to both the release of land and the actual delivery of schemes.

Phasing may also be applied to avoid both over- and under-provision of housing and employment land supply. In circumstances where phasing is necessary, a plan setting out the phasing arrangement, sequence of events, how it will be managed and their relationship with the rest of the overall development approach set out in the Core Strategy will be established.

Monitoring

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) sets out the timetable for the preparation of Development Plan Documents. We will also monitor the delivery of the targets identified in the LDS.

Monitoring the effects and outcomes is an essential part of the Core Strategy and other Development Plan Documents. Stratford-on-Avon District is faced with a number of issues and challenges that are clearly stated in the Core Strategy and it is expected that the policies will help to address them. In this regard, we will be monitoring the effectiveness of the policies of the Core Strategy and other DPDs to assess how well they are delivering their objectives.

A Monitoring and Implementation Framework setting out how the relevant policies of the Core Strategy will be assessed is to be created. It will provide the basis for monitoring the performance of the policies against a set of indicators. This will help to ensure a consistent approach to monitoring the effectiveness and impacts of the policies.

The outcome of the monitoring process will be reported in the Council's Annual Monitoring Report that will be produced on a yearly basis in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This will be based on the period 1 April to 31 March and be submitted to the Secretary of State at the end of each calendar year.

Housing sites relating to specific components of housing supply set out in table on page 17

Settlement	Location	Dwellings
A. Sites comprising 10 or more dwellings with planning permission at 31.03.08		
Alcester	Priory Road	14
Bidford-on-Avon	Friday Furlong, Waterloo Road	149
Lighthorne Heath	Leam Road	10
Lighthorne Heath	Verney Road	10
Southam	Wattons Lane	87
Stratford-upon-Avon	Shottery Hall, Church Lane	20
Stratford-upon-Avon	Briarcroft, Alcester Road	36
Stratford-upon-Avon	Former Cattle Market, Alcester Road	197
Stratford-upon-Avon	Regal Road	20
Stratford-upon-Avon	Former NCJ Factory, Birmingham Road	86
Stratford-upon-Avon	Trinity Mead, Bridgetown	10
Stratford-upon-Avon	Tiddington Road	17
Studley	Alcester Road	20
B. Sites within settlements identified in Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment published in February 2008 (except those now with planning permission or identified as Proposed Development Locations in the Draft Core Strategy)		
Alcester	Meadow View/Hospital	20
Bidford-on-Avon	Former United Carriers, Waterloo Road	15
Bidford-on-Avon	Tower Hill/Court Way	15
Henley-in-Arden	Former Cattle Market, Warwick Road	40 *
Kineton	Banbury Road	30
Kineton	Mill Street	10
Shipston-on-Stour	Tilemans Lane	60 *
Southam	High Street	15 *
Stratford-upon-Avon	Windsor Street	25 *
Stratford-upon-Avon	Dudfields Nurseries, Tavern Lane, Shottery	15
Stratford-upon-Avon	Town Square	15
Stratford-upon-Avon	Banbury Road	75 *
Stratford-upon-Avon	Arden Street	25 *
Stratford-upon-Avon	Shipston Road	45
Stratford-upon-Avon	TA Centre, New Broad Street	15
Stratford-upon-Avon	Clifford & Sons, Sanctus Street	10
Stratford-upon-Avon	Guild Street	50
Stratford-upon-Avon	Loxley Road	30
Studley	Eagle Building, New Road	15
Wellesbourne	Kineton Road	10

* site also allocated for housing development in Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan Review



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