

LEISURE**INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT**

- 10.1 This section of the Local Plan is concerned with the use and release of land and buildings for leisure and with the control of recreational development in the interests of the community and the wider environment. It sets out the policies against which planning applications for leisure proposals will be assessed by the Council.
- 10.2 Leisure is vital to the quality of life, health and well-being of the local community; nevertheless planning for future provision and assessing new proposals can be difficult. Leisure activities are diverse, ranging from organised sports such as football and cricket to informal pursuits such as walking, fishing and boating. The need for particular facilities can vary over time as tastes and interests change. Furthermore, many organisations are involved in the provision and running of facilities. They include the County Council, mainly through its education and arts service, town and parish councils, private clubs and companies and voluntary groups and societies. Sport England also provide advice on planning and improving leisure facilities.
- 10.3 In the countryside changes in farming have increased demand for diversification of farmland, which can involve new leisure activities ranging from large-scale proposals such as golf courses, to smaller informal uses such as riding stables and picnic sites. Much of the western part of the Vale is included within the area designated for the Great Western Community Forest within which a range of new opportunities for informal recreation are likely to emerge. The Wilts & Berks Canal Partnership are actively restoring the former canal which crosses the Vale, opening up new areas of the countryside for public access. Within the towns there is continued demand for built leisure facilities from both the public and private sectors, reflecting people's changing expectations and the growing awareness of the benefits of sport and exercise.
- 10.4 The Council is alert to these pressures and wishes to ensure an appropriate planning policy framework is in place which will safeguard existing recreational facilities and allow new proposals to come forward. Aim 4 of this Plan is 'to maintain and improve the quality of life of all members of the local community'. The aim includes specific acknowledgement of the need to: maintain and improve the range of facilities available for leisure and recreation; protect rights of way and promote access to the countryside; and safeguard green open spaces within settlements. The policies set out later in this chapter seek to fulfil these aims

within the context provided by planning guidance from the government and the policies of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan as described briefly below.

Planning Guidance from Central Government

- 10.5 Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 *Sport, Open Space and Recreation* published in July 2002 (PPG 17) provides a clear statement of the Government's intention to protect existing sport, open space and recreation facilities and create new ones. It states at para 1 "Local Authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sport and recreational facilities". Para 4 goes on to say "Assessments and audits will allow Local Authorities to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. They form the starting point for establishing an effective strategy at the local level, and for effective planning through the development of appropriate policies in plans". The guidance makes it clear that the Government believes that open space standards are best set locally and included in development plans.
- 10.6 In PPG3: *Housing* the government emphasises the need for local plans to have clear policies for the protection and creation of open space and playing fields. New housing development should incorporate sufficient provision where such spaces are not already adequately provided within easy access of the new housing. Developing more housing within urban areas should not mean building on urban green spaces.
- 10.7 PPS6: *Planning for Town Centres* contains advice on the location of commercial leisure facilities. The advice confirms that some leisure uses, such as theatres and pubs, are best located in local centres whilst others need to attract customers from a wider area. Where appropriate sites can be found in or on the edge of town centres, these should be considered for major leisure uses such as small multi-screen cinemas and ten pin bowling. Where this is not possible they should be located where they are highly accessible by public transport.

The Oxfordshire Structure Plan

- 10.8 The Oxfordshire Structure Plan has a range of strategic policies covering recreation issues. These policies seek the optimum use of existing resources and give support to new provision in appropriate locations, especially in association with new development or where there are existing deficiencies. The policies also seek to protect the existing rights of way network in the county and to safeguard the character and environment of the River Thames, whilst at the same time encouraging wider access to the countryside.

The District Council's Cultural Strategy

- 10.9 The District Council has a dual role in planning for leisure; as local planning authority it has a remit to deal with planning applications for leisure use in the light of policies in the Local Plan, but it is also a major provider of leisure facilities and services. To assist in this latter role the District Council published in July 2000 *Our Cultural Vision – Leisure 2000–2005*. The vision sets out leisure priorities in the district for the period 2000–2005, covering the arts, sport, play, informal recreation, parks, open space and landscape, leisure community development, leisure facilities management, horticulture, arboriculture and recreational grants. The vision concludes with a list of 27 actions, most of which relate to the promotion and management of leisure services. Two actions relate specifically to the use of land or buildings; action 4 refers to addressing the identified playing field shortage in the Vale and action 12 seeks to ensure leisure involvement in the preparation of this Local Plan.

POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

Provision for Leisure in Association with New Development

- 10.10 Government advice as referred to above makes it clear that local plans provide the appropriate context in which to assess local needs for recreational facilities and to ensure that provision is properly co-ordinated with other forms of development and other land use policies. The advice stresses that local plan policies should offer 'reasonable certainty to developers, landowners and residents about the weight to be given to sport, recreation and open space needs'. Sport and recreation facilities and open space can form important components of housing and major commercial developments and such developments in themselves can generate demand for new facilities or place existing facilities under greater pressure.
- 10.11 The Council wishes to ensure that local residents' recreational needs continue to be adequately provided for and, in accordance with aim 4 of this Local Plan, it will seek the provision of open space and other sporting and leisure facilities as appropriate, in association with new development. Government advice indicates that local authorities may enter into legal agreements with developers to secure such facilities. Policy DC8 confirms the Council's intention to use this mechanism as necessary, where a need for additional or improved recreation facilities can be directly related to a proposed development. In the case of small new developments, which in themselves do not justify provision of new leisure facilities, legal agreements may be sought to secure a contribution to existing or proposed provision nearby. Other specific policies in this Plan, in particular policies H5 and H7, demonstrate the Council's commitment to securing provision of open space,

sports and recreation facilities in association with proposals for new development. The requirement and standard for open space provision within new housing development is set out in policy H23.

- 10.12 It is the Council's intention to undertake an audit of existing recreational facilities, establish local provision standards and develop a programme designed to achieve those standards. This work will be used to inform and guide the preparation of future legal agreements and when completed will be published separately as a Supplementary Planning Document.
- 10.13 Open spaces within or adjoining settlements are an important resource for the local community. The Government attaches great importance to the retention of open space and stresses the need for people, particularly children and the elderly, to have access to such space close to where they live.

Protecting Open Space Within Settlements

- 10.14 Open space within the Vale's settlements has a variety of forms and functions. Playing space is land recognised as being suitable for play and includes playing pitches for formal sports, play areas and other space suitable for play, to which the public have access. There are other areas of undeveloped land, which may not be suitable for play but which have important local amenity value. Such areas can include formal gardens, woods, water areas or even large highway verges. In addition, within Abingdon, Grove and Wantage, there are valuable linear spaces and green corridors adjacent to the rivers Stert, Ock, Thames and Letcombe Brook. The public has access to much of this land but some is in private ownership. The following sections of the Local Plan consider these types of space in more detail and set out the Council's policies for their protection.

Playing Space

- 10.15 Nationally recommended standards for the availability of playing space have been established by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA). These standards suggest that a total of 2.4 hectares (6 acres) of playing space should be provided for every 1000 population. The Council is committed to ensuring these minimum standards are achieved in the district and to this end has carried out a quantitative study of formal playing space provision in the Vale's five main settlements. (A summary of the study is included in a background paper published separately to this Local Plan). The survey has been restricted to the main settlements of Abingdon, Botley (including all of North Hinksey and Cumnor parishes), Faringdon, Grove and Wantage, acknowledging that in accordance with the Local Plan strategy, this is where most new development is likely to take place. It is hoped that a more detailed and comprehensive survey of existing leisure facilities (including playing space) can be undertaken for the whole district, from which a strategy will be formulated and a programme of future provision developed.

10.16 The results of the 2002 playing space survey are set out in the table below.

| Survey of Playing Space 2002 – summary of findings | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Population (2001) | Sports Pitches 1.6–1.8ha per 1000 | | Outdoor Play Space 0.6–0.8ha per 1000 | | Total Hectares | |
| | NPFA | Provision (02) | NPFA | Provision (02) | NPFA | Provision (02) |
| Abingdon 32,526 | 52.04–58.55 | 49.25 | 19.5–26.0 | 45.60 | 71.54–84.55 | 94.85 |
| Wantage 9,442 | 15.11–17.00 | 11.59 | 5.7– 7.5 | 10.18 | 20.81–24.5 | 21.77 |
| Grove 8,212 | 13.14–14.78 | 10.54 | 4.93–6.6 | 7.74 | 18.03–21.38 | 18.28 |
| Faringdon 6,053 | 9.7 –10.9 | 8.28 | 3.63–4.8 | 3.21 | 13.31–15.7 | 11.49 |
| Botley 8,967 | 14.35–16.1 | 17.73 | 5.4– 7.2 | 4.96 | 19.75–23.3 | 22.69 |

10.17 In **Abingdon** the study suggests that the overall provision of playing space is adequate by comparison to the NPFA standard; however, sports pitches are under-provided but space suitable for play is well above standard. This is accounted for by the large areas of open space along the Thames, at Abbey Meadows, Albert Park and Long Furlong. The study indicates that **Wantage** is within standard for outdoor play space but is below standard for sports pitches. The proposal for a new pitch at Tuckwell Fields opposite the cricket ground on the A417 east of Wantage will help to address this shortfall. The situation at **Grove** is similar to Wantage with a shortfall of sports pitches but play space is within standard. In **Botley** sports pitches meet the standard and play space is just below standard. At **Faringdon** sports pitches and play space are below standard.

10.18 It is difficult to provide new playing space within existing built-up areas and yet this is where demand is concentrated. For this reason the Council will protect existing space with recreational value. The policy set out below will apply to proposals for development of non-recreation uses on both private and public playing space (including school playing fields, school playgrounds and existing and previous playspace). It will be applied throughout the district. (Policies to secure provision of new playing and other forms of open space in association with new development are set out elsewhere, including policy DC8 and the housing chapter of the Plan).

10.19 Departures from the policy will be permitted only rarely, for example where an alternative use can be demonstrated to be the best way of retaining or enhancing a facility or where a replacement of equivalent or greater benefit to the community is proposed. Alternative provision will need to be secured by a planning condition or by a legal agreement.

POLICY L1

DEVELOPMENT ON EXISTING OUTDOOR PLAYING SPACE (INCLUDING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPORTS AND PLAYING FIELDS, SCHOOL PLAYING FIELDS AND PLAY AREAS) WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED, IF A DEFICIENCY IN SUCH SPACE WILL NOT BE CREATED, OR ADDED TO.

WHERE THERE IS AN EXISTING DEFICIENCY OF PLAYING SPACE OR WHERE A DEFICIENCY WOULD BE CREATED, THE LOSS OF ALL OR PART OF AN EXISTING PLAYING SPACE MAY BE PERMITTED EXCEPTIONALLY IF:

- i) ALTERNATIVE PROVISION CAN BE SECURED WHICH WILL REPLACE FULLY THE PLAYING SPACE LOST.**
- ii) IN THE CASE OF SPORTS OR PLAYING FIELDS (INCLUDING SCHOOL PLAYING FIELDS AND PLAYGROUNDS), REDEVELOPMENT OF A SMALL PART OF THE SITE IS THE BEST WAY OF RETAINING OR ENHANCING THE EXISTING SPORTS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND ONLY AFFECTS LAND WHICH IS INCAPABLE OF FORMING A PLAYING PITCH INCLUDING A PITCH OF JUNIOR SIZE.**
- iii) THE ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IS OF EQUAL OR BETTER VALUE IN TERMS OF SCALE, QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY AND IS MADE AVAILABLE PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.**
- iv) THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT IS FOR AN OUTDOOR OR INDOOR SPORTS FACILITY OF SUFFICIENT BENEFIT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT TO OUTWEIGH THE LOSS OF THE PLAYING SPACE.**

10.20 The above policy does not rule out the development of ancillary buildings and facilities such as changing rooms on existing recreational open space. The Council will seek to secure the fullest use of existing playing space by, for example, encouraging the dual or joint use of private or school facilities, or the provision of synthetic all-weather pitches, where this will not harm the environment or amenity of local residents.

Urban Open Space and Green Corridors

10.21 In addition to playing space there are many other areas of largely undeveloped land within settlements which contribute to the character of the settlement and help to create a local sense of place. Such areas include formal parks and gardens, small areas of woodland, water courses and even wide tree-lined highway verges. The Council attaches great importance to the retention of such areas.

10.22 Central government advice in PPG17 suggests that the designation of land as urban open space on the Local Plan proposals map will help to ensure that their amenity

and/or recreational value is acknowledged and taken into account in considering proposals for development.

- 10.23 Urban open space has therefore been identified on the proposals map in the main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage. Designation has been restricted to these parts of the district because, in the context of the Local Plan strategy, this is where the greatest development pressure is expected.
- 10.24 The proposals map also identifies four green corridors in the main settlements which the Council believes are deserving of special recognition and protection. They are the Ock and Stert Valleys and Thames Riverside in Abingdon and the Letcombe Brook in Wantage and Grove. The policy in the previous adopted Local Plan to 2001 has been effective in maintaining the special character of these corridors and it is proposed to carry the policy forward into this Local Plan (policy L3 below). The corridors are often important recreational spaces in their own right. In some cases they provide alternative routes for pedestrians and cyclists away from busy roads but they also have an enormous amenity value, introducing green areas into the built-up areas of the towns and bringing the natural environment closer to where people live. In addition to their amenity and recreational value the green corridors provide an important habitat for wildlife and it is important that the habitat on which the wildlife depends is protected or enhanced.
- 10.25 **Ock Valley, Abingdon:** The Ock Valley green corridor stretches from the centre of Abingdon right out to the countryside on the western edge of the town. As the River Ock meanders along its floodplain its course is braided and several ditches feed into the river at various points along its length. The floodplain has in the main remained undeveloped and most of the adjoining development turns its back to the river. The corridor has a very rural character which retains its natural appearance by low levels of maintenance. At its eastern end the corridor is narrower and the willows and riverside vegetation provide an attractive contrast to the mainly residential development to the north and south. At its western end the corridor is wider and there are fewer trees and views into the open countryside and of adjoining development giving the corridor a more open appearance. The adjoining development again tends to turn its back on the corridor and is more commercial in character. The whole corridor provides an attractive pedestrian route away from traffic both into the town centre and to the shopping development on the western edge of town.
- 10.26 **Stert Valley, including Boxhill Wood, Abingdon:** One of the smaller green corridors in the Local Plan area, the Stert Valley provides an attractive leafy open space at the heart of a densely developed urban space stretching north from the town centre. In addition to the stream itself an important feature of this corridor is the large number of mature and semi-mature trees. The woodland gives the corridor a strong sense of enclosure by restricting the views into and out of the valley. The maintenance of the woodland is kept to a minimum to ensure its natural appearance is retained. At Boxhill Road and Fitzharry's Road there are fewer trees

and the valley is more open, the grassed areas are regularly cut, giving a more manicured appearance. The remains of Fitzharry's Mound, an ancient fortification which is a scheduled ancient monument, is an important feature at the southern end of the valley. A public footpath runs along the corridor which is well used by residents and provides a direct link to the town centre away from the main roads. Elsewhere in the Local Plan it is proposed that a recreational cycleway should be created along the Stert Valley.

- 10.27 **Abingdon riverside:** The juxtaposition of the historic core of Abingdon close to the northern bank of the Thames, the river itself and the undeveloped floodplain, all combine to form what many consider to be one of the most attractive stretches along the Thames. The open areas within this corridor are for the most part owned and maintained by the District Council and, in addition to their visual importance, provide a well used recreational resource for both local residents and visitors. There are important views not only from the floodplain across to many outstanding historic buildings but also from the town and Abbey Meadows out across the floodplain. The open areas at the western end of the corridor are laid out as formal gardens where the grass areas and flower beds are all maintained to a high standard. At the eastern end of the corridor the Abbey Meadows is exclusively used for leisure purposes.
- 10.28 **The Letcombe Brook, Wantage and Grove:** One of the most delightful features of both Wantage and Grove is the valley of the Letcombe Brook which runs like a thread through both settlements. Although the valley is not physically well defined, the floodplain has for the most part been kept free from development with the result that a corridor of green leafy open space has remained along the brook. Public footpaths run by the side of the brook in many places and are much enjoyed by residents and visitors who appreciate the tranquillity of the surroundings largely free from traffic.
- 10.29 In Wantage the corridor forms an important feature in the conservation area, affording specific views of particular features such as the Church Tower and panoramic views of the predominantly Victorian roofscape. North of Mill Street the brook passes through a wider and more open valley. Along this stretch a footpath and corridor of open space has been created alongside the brook as part of the redevelopment of the former scrap yard. Between Wantage and Grove the brook passes briefly through an area more open in character before entering Grove. Within Grove the brook and adjacent open space has often been used to create a feature in new development. The area along the brook not only provides a much appreciated visual amenity but is also extensively used as an important recreational amenity.

POLICY L2

DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF URBAN OPEN SPACES AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, OR WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THEIR VISUAL AMENITY, RECREATIONAL OR ECOLOGICAL VALUE, WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

POLICY L3

WITHIN THE GREEN CORRIDORS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, NEW DEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE IT WILL NOT:

- i) DESTROY OR DETRACT FROM THE PREDOMINANTLY OPEN NATURE AND CONTINUITY OF THE CORRIDOR CONCERNED OR BE HARMFUL TO ITS SPECIAL CHARACTER; OR**
- ii) BE VISUALLY INTRUSIVE.**
- iii) HARM THE ECOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE CORRIDOR.**
- iv) HARM AREAS OF EXISTING IMPORTANT TREE AND PLANT COVERAGE.**

Allotments

10.30 Responsibility for the provision and management of allotments rests mainly with the town and parish councils. At present the supply across the Vale appears to meet the current level of demand. The Council has not been made aware of any particular demand for new provision which needs to be taken into account in the Local Plan. Nevertheless it will seek to safeguard existing sites for future use. Proposals for development on allotment land will only be permitted if alternative land for allotment use of a similar or better quality is provided on a conveniently located site elsewhere.

POLICY L4

DEVELOPMENT ON EXISTING ALLOTMENTS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE;

- i) A DEFICIENCY IN PROVISION WILL NOT BE CREATED OR ADDED TO, OR**
- ii) IN CASES WHERE A DEFICIENCY IN PROVISION WOULD BE CREATED OR ADDED TO, ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IS SECURED WHICH IS OF EQUAL OR BETTER VALUE IN TERMS OF ITS SIZE, QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY AND WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE PRIOR TO COMMENCEMENT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.**

Built Leisure Facilities

- 10.31 Whilst open space is fairly well distributed throughout the district, purpose-built indoor facilities tend to be concentrated in the main urban areas. The District Council is involved in the running of leisure centres at Faringdon, Wantage and the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre and Tilsley Park at Abingdon. Wherever practicable, the Council also seeks to encourage the increased community use of sporting facilities which are owned by public organisations, such as sports facilities in schools and on defence establishments, acknowledging that making fuller use of existing resources will contribute to sustainable development objectives by reducing the need for additional facilities and the potential loss of some resources. The Council's policies for dealing with proposals for new built leisure facilities have to address a wide range of possible circumstances, ranging from, for example, whole sports complexes to more modest ancillary developments associated with existing facilities. The majority of proposals are likely to come forward on sites within existing settlements and whilst the Council is sympathetic to the need for improvements to leisure provision it will be concerned to ensure that the environment and amenity of local residents and the character and appearance of the Vale's towns and villages will not be harmed by such proposals.

Regional and Sub-Regional Leisure Facilities

- 10.32 The District Council considers that commercial leisure attractions of a regional or sub-regional scale such as theme parks, major sport stadia or large leisure and holiday complexes are unlikely to be accommodated in the district without causing significant harm to its rural character. Such uses attract large numbers of people from a wide catchment area and are likely to cause environmental problems such as traffic congestion and noise. Suitable sites are unlikely to be found in built-up areas without conflict being caused with existing residential development and the scale of development is likely to be obtrusive in the countryside and would breach the policies of restraint referred to elsewhere in the Plan.

POLICY L5

PROPOSALS FOR REGIONAL OR SUB-REGIONAL LEISURE FACILITIES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THEY WOULD NOT:

- i) CONFLICT WITH THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY AND POLICIES FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE;**
- ii) LEAD TO UNACCEPTABLE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE AMENITIES OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS; OR**
- iii) PREJUDICE STRUCTURE AND LOCAL PLAN POLICIES OF DEVELOPMENT RESTRAINT.**

Major Leisure and Entertainment Facilities

10.33 Historically most major commercial leisure facilities such as cinemas, skating rinks and nightclubs have been located in town centres but, as with retail development, there has been a recent trend towards major edge-of-town commercial leisure schemes. In order to retain and enhance their viability and vitality, town centres remain the Council's preferred location for major commercial leisure facilities. Such locations provide optimum accessibility on foot and by public transport for potential customers, whilst the presence of leisure facilities can be an important component of the mix of town centre uses adding in particular to the evening economy. Following the sequential approach recommended in Government Planning Policy Statement 6: *Planning for Town Centres* (PPS6), if town centre locations are not available, the Council's next preference is for edge-of centre sites, district and local centres and only then out-of-centre sites that are accessible by a choice of transport. This is consistent with the approach to new retail development set out in Chapter 12 on shopping and town centres. Wherever large-scale commercial leisure facilities are proposed, the development will be expected to comply with the general policies for development set out in Chapter 4 of this Plan.

POLICY L6

MAJOR COMMERCIAL LEISURE FACILITIES WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE A LOCAL NEED HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AND:

- i) **THEY ARE PROPOSED TO BE LOCATED WITHIN TOWN CENTRES; OR**
- ii) **ON THE EDGES OF TOWN CENTRES AND AT DISTRICT AND LOCAL CENTRES IF NO SUITABLE SITE CAN BE FOUND WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRES; OR**
- iii) **AT OUT OF TOWN CENTRES IF;**
 - a) **THERE ARE NO SUITABLE SITES WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRES, EDGE OF TOWN CENTRES, DISTRICT AND LOCAL CENTRES; AND**
 - b) **THE SITE IS ACCESSIBLE BY A RANGE OF TRANSPORT MODES INCLUDING WALKING, CYCLING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT.**

10.34 Town centres are defined on the proposals map at Abingdon, Wantage, and Faringdon and local centres are defined at Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage.

- 10.35 The precise location of the leisure facilities to be built in association with the strategic housing site on the former airfield west of Grove, Policy H5 will be subject to the preparation of detailed Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Small-Scale Local Leisure Facilities

- 10.36 The District Council wishes to protect existing local open space, sport and recreational facilities which are available to the public and to prevent their loss to other uses. Policy L7 below establishes this principle. Proposals for new small-scale, open space, sport and recreation facilities designed to serve local communities, or schemes to extend such facilities, will be welcomed, provided they comply with the general policies for development set out in Chapter 4 of the Local Plan in particular policy DC5 which dealt with access and the requirements in policy L8 below:

POLICY L7

DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF EXISTING LOCAL LEISURE FACILITIES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS:

- i) **THERE IS NO LONGER A NEED FOR THE FACILITY, OR**
- ii) **IF THERE IS A NEED FOR THE FACILITY ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IN TERMS OF ITS SIZE, QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.**

POLICY L8

SMALL SCALE DEVELOPMENTS FOR OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION WILL BE PERMITTED WITHIN OR ON THE EDGE OF SETTLEMENTS PROVIDED THEY:

- **MEET AN IDENTIFIED LOCAL NEED,**
- **DO NOT REQUIRE BUILDINGS OR WORKS OF A TYPE OR SCALE WHICH WOULD BE HARMFUL TO THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA,**
- **DO NOT HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE ECOLOGY OF THE AREA.**

The Provision of Countryside Recreation Facilities

- 10.37 The countryside is used extensively for informal recreational activities such as walking, cycling, running, riding, fishing and picnicking. With the general increase in leisure activity and greater awareness of rural opportunities, participation in countryside pursuits is expected to grow, putting pressure on existing facilities and resources and creating demands for their expansion and for the provision of new facilities. This is occurring at a time when major changes are taking place in

agriculture. Farmers are being encouraged to seek new sources of income to support their farming activity and farm diversification is becoming commonplace. In this context, recreation may no longer be regarded as a threat to the countryside as, with careful planning, it can be a means of helping to conserve it.

- 10.38 In general, provided the interests of farming are safeguarded, and as long as the qualities of the rural environment are protected from damage, the Council believes that public access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside should be encouraged. Where opportunities arise to improve or develop facilities which will promote public enjoyment and understanding of the countryside, in principle they will be considered favourably. This might involve the provision of small picnic sites, roadside parking areas, viewing points and interpretation facilities. The after-use of mineral workings may also create an opportunity for enhancing the recreational facilities of an area by, for example, providing for new footpaths and picnic sites or small scale water-based activities such as canoeing, windsurfing or fishing.
- 10.39 Where the provision of a recreational facility is considered acceptable the Council will seek to ensure that car parking and access arrangements are adequate in accordance with policy DC5 of this Local Plan. It will also wish to be satisfied that the development will not detract from the character of the surrounding countryside. Within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Vale Corallian Ridge maintenance of the quality of the landscape will be a primary consideration and this may take precedence over the proposed provision of a new facility.

POLICY L9

SMALL-SCALE DEVELOPMENTS TO PROVIDE FACILITIES FOR INFORMAL COUNTRYSIDE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, OR WHICH WILL PROMOTE PUBLIC ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THEY:

- i) MAINTAIN THE OPEN AND UNDEVELOPED NATURE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, AND DO NOT REQUIRE BUILDINGS OF A TYPE OR SCALE WHICH WOULD BE HARMFUL TO THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA;**
- ii) DO NOT CONFLICT WITH THE NEEDS OF AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY; AND**
- iii) DO NOT HAVE A DETRIMENTAL EFFECT ON THE LANDSCAPE OR ECOLOGY OF THE AREA.**

Safeguarding and Improving Public Rights of Way

- 10.40 Compared with other counties Oxfordshire is relatively poorly endowed with extensive countryside offering general open access to the public. Access rights over the Vale's network of public rights of way are therefore all the more valued in maintaining accessibility to the countryside. Public rights of way are an important

recreational resource providing both residents and visitors to the district the opportunity to enjoy quiet, open countryside. Public rights of way are shown on a 'Definitive Map' prepared by Oxfordshire County Council who manage and maintain the existing network. The map was reviewed and republished in 1999.

- 10.41 Under the provision of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the County Council prepared a *Rights of Way Improvement Plan* (RoWIP) 2006-2011. The RoWIP, which was adopted by the County Council on 21st February 2006, sets out ambitions for the improvement of public rights of way in order to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility problems.
- 10.42 One way of encouraging the use of public rights of way is to establish circular walks. Both the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Oxfordshire County Council have been active in recent years in promoting circular walks based on local centres. These include a 'Two Rivers Walk' at Abingdon and routes starting from Wantage and Faringdon, the latter taking in Folly Hill.
- 10.43 In its role as local planning authority, the District Council will take into account the need to safeguard existing rights of way and in conjunction with the County Council will seek to improve the attractiveness and extent of the network, in particular where existing provision is known to be poor. To this end, the Council will seek to use planning conditions or legal agreements with developers to ensure rights of way are protected and opportunities to improve the network are secured.
- 10.44 If diversions to the existing network are proposed in association with a development proposal, a safe, attractive and convenient alternative must be provided which will benefit the public. It should be noted that the stopping up or diversion of an existing public right of way for whatever reason needs to be dealt with separately from any proposals which may require planning permission.
- 10.45 The Council will require new developments, for example housing or employment, to be linked into the existing rights of way network. This requirement is set out in policy DC5 of the Local Plan.

POLICY L10

DEVELOPMENT OVER PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS ALTERNATIVE PROVISION CAN BE MADE THAT IS EQUALLY OR MORE ATTRACTIVE, SAFE AND CONVENIENT TO RIGHTS OF WAY USERS.

Safeguarding Long-Distance Recreational Footpaths

- 10.46 There is an increasing interest in improving the national network of long distance paths because of the recreational opportunities they offer local people and the

economic benefits they can bring to an area by attracting visitors. Three such long-distance routes pass through the Vale, the Ridgeway and the Thames Path, both of which are National Trails, and the d'Arcy Dalton Way.

The Ridgeway

- 10.47 With its origins in the Stone Age, the Ridgeway can claim to be one of the oldest roads in Europe. It follows the highest part of the chalk escarpment, offering attractive views and in places a superb sense of remoteness.
- 10.48 The Vale's section of the Ridgeway forms part of the national trail from Overton Hill, near Avebury, Wiltshire, to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire. The route was designated a national trail in 1972; it runs for some 137 km (85 miles). Management of the Ridgeway national trail is undertaken by a management group consisting of representatives of the Countryside Agency and of local highway authorities. A national trails officer and team carry out the day-to-day management of the trail, along with the management of the Thames Path national trail.
- 10.49 The Management Strategy for the Ridgeway national trail covers the period 1999–2004. The management remit is to:
- provide and secure a high quality experience of the Ridgeway for all walkers and, where appropriate, cyclists and horseriders to include:
 - i) quality in the information provision and service before a visit
 - ii) quality in the variety of opportunities for enjoying the trail from just a short visit to an extended journey and, for walkers, the completion of the whole trail
 - iii) quality in the experience of the visit;
 - encourage and assist people into the countryside and to give them confidence and respect for it;
 - attract local, national and international visitors and to support the local economy;
 - encourage an appreciation, awareness and understanding of the Ridgeway, its surroundings, the people who live and work in the area and the variety of people who visit;
 - adopt a sustainable approach to the management of the Ridgeway;
 - encourage and assist the conservation and enhancement of the heritage and ecological landscape within the trail corridor.
- 10.50 Concern with the surface condition of the trail and the damage caused by the inappropriate use by motorised vehicles remains a major issue. Standards for the surface of the Ridgeway were established in 2001 and an audit against these new standards undertaken in March/April 2002. Over 22 miles of The Ridgeway through Oxfordshire and West Berkshire have become 'restricted byways' a new

category of public rights of way introduced under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. Restricted byways can be used by walkers, cyclists, horseriders and drivers of horse-drawn carriages, but not by recreational vehicles such as motorcycles and '4 by 4' vehicles.

- 10.51 The District Council clearly recognises the tourism, recreational, ecological and historic significance and potential of the Ridgeway. It supports in principle the management aims set out above. As the Ridgeway passes through the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the stringent controls set out elsewhere in the Local Plan will be used to prevent any development which might harm its special character or its surroundings. The District Council will also exercise its planning powers to ensure trees and hedgerows are protected and that new agricultural buildings are not erected which would harm the enjoyment of the trail. Existing buildings on or close to the Ridgeway may be considered suitable for conversion to provide accommodation or other services for walkers, horseriders and cyclists, subject to the general policies for development and tourism set out elsewhere in the Local Plan.

POLICY L11

DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD:

- i) HARM THE REMOTE AND TRANQUIL QUALITY OF THE RIDGEWAY**
- ii) CAUSE HARM TO THE PATH**
- iii) RESULT IN THE LOSS OF IMPORTANT TREES AND HEDGEROWS ALONG ITS ROUTE; OR**
- iv) DIMINISH THE ENJOYMENT EXPERIENCED BY ITS USERS THROUGH INCREASED EROSION, NOISE DISTURBANCE OR VISUAL INTRUSION.**

The Thames Path

- 10.52 The Thames Path, opened in 1996, is unique as a national trail being the only one to follow a river throughout its length of 184 miles, including a substantial stretch within a major city.
- 10.53 A 'gentle' national trail with few steep natural gradients, the Thames Path can provide opportunities for a broad range of people to visit the countryside.
- 10.54 In the Vale upstream of Oxford, the path travels through a relatively remote, attractive, agricultural landscape. Nevertheless it is within a reasonable distance of several settlements which provide a range of facilities and services for walkers. Downstream of Oxford it passes through Abingdon before re-emerging into the

countryside. The route of the Thames Path within the District is shown on the proposals map.

- 10.55 Like the Ridgeway the management of the Thames Path national trail is undertaken by a management group consisting of representatives of the Countryside Agency, the Environment Agency and of local highway authorities.
- 10.56 The current management strategy for the national trail covers the period 2001–2006. The management remit is very similar to that adopted for the Ridgeway (see paragraph 10.49 above). In April 2006 The Thames Path Management Group produced for consultation a Draft Thames Path Strategy which will cover the period 2006-2011.
- 10.57 The District Council recognises the value and importance of the Thames Path as a recreational and tourism resource and will exercise its planning powers to safeguard the path and its immediate environment. In particular it will seek to protect trees and hedgerows which contribute to the quality of the path and ensure that inappropriate built development (including agricultural buildings) is not permitted in the vicinity of the path.

POLICY L12

DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE THAMES PATH OR ITS ENJOYMENT BY ITS USERS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

The d'Arcy Dalton Way

- 10.58 The Oxfordshire Fieldpaths Society in 1987 identified the potential for a long-distance footpath crossing the Upper Thames from north to south, to complement the broadly east–west routes of the Ridgeway and the Thames Path. The route, named the d'Arcy Dalton Way, links the Berkshire Downs around Waylands Smithy with the Cotswolds, north of Banbury, crossing the Thames at Radcot Bridge. It covers some 105km (65 miles) of definitive rights of way and public footpaths.
- 10.59 The Countryside Agency has recognised the d'Arcy Dalton Way as a Regional Route. Such routes are defined as those which provide walking or riding of a day or more duration and where this is linked to accommodation and public transport.
- 10.60 The District Council will seek to encourage the full establishment of the d'Arcy Dalton Way, protecting its route through the rights of way policy L10 above. The route in the Vale is shown on the proposals map.

Proposed Park at Folly Hill, Faringdon

- 10.61 Folly Hill on the outskirts of Faringdon is a well known feature in the landscape to which the public enjoy access. It acts as an informal recreational area providing a superb walk and giving unrivalled views across the surrounding countryside. In the Council's adopted Local Plan to 2001 this land, together with the former quarry at Jespers Hill, south of Stanford Road, was proposed as a park. The proposal was well received locally and therefore it is being carried forward into this Plan. The prominence and character of the land, much of which is in the conservation area, make it unsuitable for alternative uses which would involve substantial built development or radical change to the landscape.
- 10.62 Since the idea of the park was first put forward part of the former nursery (around the lake) has been acquired by the District Council. It has been developed as the first phase of the park. Plans were prepared for the site and work has been carried out to improve pedestrian access, provide a small car park and a picnic area. Fishing platforms have also been provided.
- 10.63 Policies elsewhere in this Local Plan propose additional housing (Policy H4) and additional employment (Policy E3) in the vicinity of the park. Legal agreements will be sought from the developers of adjoining land and other sites in the town to secure land and/or financial contributions towards the provision and on-going management and maintenance of the park as shown on the proposals map.
- 10.64 The advantages of extending the park with this additional land are that:
- i) it would link phase one of the park to the edge of Faringdon, thus providing an opportunity to improve pedestrian and cycle links from the town to the park and surrounding countryside;
 - iii) the character and appearance of the site and the edge of Faringdon could be enhanced; and
 - iv) the site is eminently suitable for this type of amenity; its elevated position offers fine views of the surrounding countryside.
- 10.65 It would be essential that the future development of the park for informal recreation is planned and co-ordinated in a comprehensive manner. The land is at present in a number of different ownerships and the Council will work with the owners and other potential partners to develop a comprehensive plan for its implementation and on-going management.

POLICY L13

LAND AT FARINGDON, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, IS PROPOSED FOR DEVELOPMENT AS A PARK TO PROVIDE OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. BECAUSE OF THE SITE'S PROMINENCE IN THE LANDSCAPE, BUILT DEVELOPMENT WILL BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM AND WILL BE REQUIRED TO BE DESIGNED AND LOCATED SO AS TO MINIMISE ITS VISUAL IMPACT.

The Wilts and Berks Canal

- 10.66 The Wilts and Berks Canal was constructed between 1785 and 1810 and linked the River Thames at Abingdon with the Kennet and Avon Canal at Semington near Melksham. The canal enjoyed profitable years until the development of the railways in the 1840s. It was finally abandoned in 1914 by an Act of Parliament. This returned the canal to the neighbouring landowners.
- 10.67 The canal crosses the Vale from south of Shrivenham in the west of the district, passing by Uffington, West Challow, East Challow, Wantage and Grove to Abingdon. At the western end of the Vale it winds gently across the flat valley floor. Between Acorn Bridge (Shrivenham) and the road from Kingston Lisle to Baulking the canal is remote from settlements and runs through open countryside with distant views of the Berkshire Downs. In this area the canal is bounded by hedgerows and standard trees.
- 10.68 From Kingston Lisle to the A338 east of Grove the canal winds close to the bottom of the greensand escarpment of the Downs. Views to the south are restricted by these hills but the slight elevation of the canal gives good views across the open countryside of the Vale to Faringdon Hill. The rural setting of the western section of the canal is modified by the canal's proximity to Wantage and Grove.
- 10.69 From the A338 at Grove to its junction with the Thames at Abingdon, the canal runs straight across a wide flat section of the Vale. It is extremely remote with distant views of the Berkshire Downs and Boars Hill. At the eastern end Didcot power station becomes more dominant.
- 10.70 East of the A34, the historic route of the canal has been built over and an alternative route needs to be found to the south of Abingdon if the restored canal is to link up to the Thames.
- 10.71 The canal is an important historic feature in the landscape and when close to settlements provides a well used recreational amenity. Where the canal is undisturbed or has been restored it provides a valuable ecological and nature conservation resource. Reinstatement of the towpath and its identification as a long-distance footpath, and if appropriate provide a cycle route, would greatly enhance the route's recreational value, perhaps eventually linking up with the Ridgeway and Thames Path.
- 10.72 The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust (2001), successor to the Wilts & Berks Amenity Group (1977), is working towards the restoration of the canal, its historic features

and towpath. The Trust has already carried out extensive restoration works on the sections of canal at Shrivenham, Wantage, Grove and Drayton. Some lengths are now in water. In the future British Waterways intend to oversee the restoration of the canal and will be keen to work in partnership with the District Council and other inland waterways organisations to reinstate the canal to full navigational use.

- 10.73 The District Council welcomes this activity and recognises the amenity, recreational and economic value of restoring sections of the canal, particularly close to urban centres. Opportunities should also be taken to investigate whether the canal could be used to alleviate drainage problems in the area. This Local Plan, in addition to protecting the historic route of the canal, seeks to safeguard a route for a new stretch of canal to the south of Abingdon as indicated on the proposals map.
- 10.74 The historic line of the Wilts and Berks Canal and the proposed new route to the south of Abingdon should be safeguarded from development which would prejudice the canal's restoration. The Council will welcome small-scale schemes which help to improve, restore and enhance the footpath and landscape features along the route of the canal and if appropriate provide a cycleway. As it becomes more intensively used there is likely to be growing pressure for facilities associated with the canal, for example, buildings, car parking areas, moorings and picnic sites. These facilities will be limited to sections of the canal where they do not restrict through-navigation, detract from the canal's environment, adversely affect wider views from the surrounding countryside or detract from the amenities of residential properties. The Council recognises that, thanks to the concerns of present owners, many sections of the canal already offer environmental and nature conservation benefits to the locality. In the process of seeking reinstatement, it will be important for all concerned to acknowledge the rights of the owners and these benefits.
- 10.75 In considering any planning applications for the restoration of the historic route or creation of the new route of a canal south of Abingdon, concerns such as the disturbance to the existing ecology and water supply will need to be satisfactorily addressed in an environmental impact statement. Regard will also need to be paid to minerals and waste issues as identified in Oxfordshire County Council's Minerals & Waste Local Plan.
- 10.76 Development on or near the route of the canal will be expected to contribute towards its restoration in order to enhance its role as a major recreational and leisure facility in the district, via planning conditions, legal agreements and/or in relation to surface water drainage arrangements.
- 10.77 The District Council will resist any proposals for development in association with the canal which would be in conflict with the restraint policies expressed elsewhere in this Plan.

POLICY L14

DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTER OF THE WILTS AND BERKS CANAL OR TO ITS SETTING, OR WOULD BE LIKELY TO PREVENT OR IMPAIR THE RESTORATION OF THE CANAL, OR WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF ANY BUILDINGS, LOCKS OR OTHER STRUCTURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ORIGINAL WATERWAY FUNCTION OF THE CANAL WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

DEVELOPMENT ON OR CLOSE TO THE ROUTE OF THE CANAL WILL BE REQUIRED TO FACILITATE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL AND/OR PROTECT ITS NATURE CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE VALUE.

DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD PREVENT THE RESTORATION OF THE CANAL ON ITS HISTORIC ALIGNMENT AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE CANAL ON A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE CAN BE SECURED BY THE DEVELOPER.

POLICY L15

DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD PREVENT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSED NEW ROUTE FOR THE CANAL SOUTH OF ABINGDON AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP WILL BE REFUSED.

Golf Courses

- 10.78 Golf courses can help to retain the open nature of the countryside, make use of redundant buildings and, in some locations, can bring positive enhancement to an area. On the other hand if care is not taken in their choice of location and in their design, new courses can change and damage the character of the countryside by introducing unnatural features such as fairways, manicured greens and bunkers. They can disturb historic or archaeological sites, or areas of ecological importance, and can have a detrimental effect upon the water environment. Other disadvantages could be the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land from food production, the introduction of large volumes of traffic onto unsuitable roads and the need for urban style development to support the course such as car parks, clubhouses, fencing and lighting. Policy L16 and the guidance set out below is written with these issues in mind.
- 10.79 The Sports Council (Southern Region) (now Sport England) published *A Guide to Golf Provision in the Southern Region* in 1995. The Guide revealed that within Oxfordshire as a whole there is an over-provision of golf courses using a measurement of one 18-hole course per 20,000 people. In the Vale in May 2002 there were seven 18-hole courses, one for every 16,000 people in the district. Although demand for further courses may therefore seem unlikely, given their potential impact on the countryside the Council considers it important to make clear its policy towards the provision of new courses.

- 10.80 The impact of a golf course on the landscape is fundamental to its acceptability. In order to be able to assess whether a golf course could be integrated satisfactorily into the landscape the Council will require details of the layout, earthmoving, proposed changes in ground levels (including any material to be brought onto the site) and landscaping to be submitted with the application. Details will also be required of the access and expected traffic generation, footpaths or bridleways in and around the site, and any on-site features of historical, archaeological or wildlife importance, so that the effect of the development on any of these factors can be assessed during the consideration of the application. Views into the site should also be considered at the design stage. (English Heritage has prepared guidance on golf course proposals in historic landscapes and the Countryside Agency has published a useful advisory booklet, *Golf Courses in the Countryside*, which the Council will refer to where necessary).
- 10.81 Proposals should make maximum use of existing trees, hedgerows and other features of interest. New planting using native species will be favoured.
- 10.82 The County Council has adopted minimum design standards to protect rights of way on golf courses and developers should have regard to these in the design of the course. Proposals which would materially reduce the safety, convenience and enjoyment of people using rights of way will not normally be permitted. The course should also be designed to allow disabled people using wheelchairs or motorised transport to play.
- 10.83 Details accompanying an application should give an indication of the agricultural quality of the land and also show the effect of the golf course on the remainder of the farm-holding and adjoining farmland and whether it creates redundant farm buildings or farmhouses.
- 10.84 It is important to ensure that golf course proposals do not result in damage to the water environment. Golf courses often require large quantities of water for irrigation, before determining the application the Council will want to ensure that irrigation will not have a detrimental effect on local land drainage or water resources.
- 10.85 Planning policies elsewhere in the plan seek to restrict the erection of new buildings in the countryside. A clubhouse and maintenance building in scale with the golfing facilities will clearly be essential for most golf courses. If possible these should be housed in existing buildings. New buildings should be designed and landscaped to have the minimum effect on the countryside. Full details of any clubhouse, its facilities and car parking should be included with the application.
- 10.86 In accordance with the Local Plan's housing policies residential accommodation will not normally be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that it is essential for a person to be available at all times for security or the proper management of the golf

course. The Council will require to be satisfied that this need cannot be met through use of existing accommodation in the area or by the conversion of an existing appropriate building. If these solutions are not possible accommodation in the form of a flat within the clubhouse may be accepted.

10.87 Proposals for ancillary facilities such as hotels, self-catering accommodation, conference centres and leisure complexes on existing and proposed golf courses will be considered in the light of the tourism policies set out in Chapter 13 of this Plan and the policies in Chapter 3 relating to development in the Green Belt.

10.88 Proposals for golf driving ranges may include an element of floodlighting. These will be considered in relation to policy DC20. Where such proposals are acceptable, the impact of lighting emissions should be minimised by use of shielding and screening and by the selection of an appropriate intensity of lighting.

POLICY L16

PROPOSALS FOR GOLF COURSES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF:

- i) **THE OPENNESS AND RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE IS MAINTAINED, IMPROVED OR RESTORED. GOLF COURSES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IN PROMINENT LOCATIONS WHERE THE LANDSCAPE WOULD BE DAMAGED;**
- ii) **BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (GRADE 1, 2 AND 3A) WILL NOT BE TAKEN AND THE PROPOSAL WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT SITES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE, OR THE WATER ENVIRONMENT;**
- iii) **ANY NEED FOR BUILDINGS WOULD BE MET FIRST BY THE ADAPTATION AND RE-USE OF EXISTING BUILDINGS ON THE SITE WHERE THESE ARE WORTHY OF RETENTION. WHERE EXISTING BUILDINGS ARE UNAVAILABLE, INSUFFICIENT OR UNSUITABLE, NEW BUILDING WILL BE LIMITED TO THAT STRICTLY NECESSARY FOR THE OPERATION OF THE GOLF COURSE, SUCH AS A CLUBHOUSE, STORAGE AND MAINTENANCE BUILDINGS. SUCH BUILDINGS MUST BE IN KEEPING WITH THE LOCALITY IN TERMS OF THEIR SITING, DESIGN AND APPEARANCE; AND**
- iv) **THE COURSE IS DESIGNED TO PROTECT OR ENHANCE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY AND WILDLIFE HABITATS.**

10.89 If there are special features on the site of a proposed golf course or if the course is in an area of special landscape designation it will be necessary to take into account the requirements of other policies in the Local Plan, for example those dealing with the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and features or areas of historic,

archaeological or nature conservation importance. In the Oxford Green Belt policy GS3 will also be relevant. Potential applicants are advised to consult the Council on the likely policy implications of their proposals.

The River Thames

- 10.90 Much of the northern and eastern boundary of the Vale of White Horse district is formed by the River Thames. The river is a major leisure resource for the people of the Vale and for visitors.
- 10.91 To understand the special environment quality of the River Thames, which the policy below seeks to protect, it is necessary to understand and appreciate its physical characteristics. The Thames borders the district for over 60km, a long stretch which, for ease of reference, can be described in two sections: from Lechlade to Wytham along the northern boundary of the district, and south of Oxford from Kennington to Appleford along the eastern boundary of the district.
- 10.92 **Lechlade to Wytham** This stretch of the River Thames is considered by many to be particularly beautiful. It is predominantly rural in character with the river meandering along a flat wide floodplain. The landscape combines water meadows, pastures and small woodlands with willows growing on the banks and in the hedgerows. The river and its margins provide a micro-habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna. The character of this stretch of the river is remote and tranquil, settlements are set away from the river and the activity that does take place is concentrated at the bridging points. All the bridges are of historic interest as are the few buildings which cluster around them. There is less boating activity on this stretch of the river than downstream; the most popular use is for informal countryside recreation such as fishing walking and picnicking.
- 10.93 **South of Oxford** South of Oxford the river continues to meander but the river and floodplain are in most places wider. Although many stretches are still agricultural in character there is more evidence of urbanisation and activity. In particular at Abingdon the river provides an important feature to the setting of the town and the watermeadows are used as an important recreational resource. This stretch of the river is extensively used for boating, with both Abingdon and Oxford being popular visitor destinations. To the north and south of Abingdon there is also much evidence of the landscape having been disturbed by gravel workings along the valley floor. Below Oxford the scale of the river can absorb more activity.
- 10.94 In recent years the number of boats registered on the Thames has declined. Research for Thames Ahead (an Environment Agency initiative to bring river interests together to improve co-ordination in planning) has revealed that nine out of ten boaters believe the river has improved for boating, with less traffic and a cleaner environment.

- 10.95 Clearly, the exploitation of the recreational potential of the river should be managed to the extent necessary to protect the general environment of the river and its landscape, including its nature conservation interest. In Oxfordshire, four district councils and the County Council exercise planning responsibilities involving the River Thames, often facing each other on opposite banks of the river. For many years, the Councils have sought to work together to secure consistency in leisure and development policy for the river. A Working Party was established in the 1970s consisting of officers from all of the authorities and the then Thames Water Authority. The policy recommendations of the Working Party published as *The River Thames Leisure Policy* (on boating) were largely accepted by the authorities, and were used as the general foundation for the County Council's strategic policies for the River Thames and for the policies in the district councils' local plans.
- 10.96 In 1992 The National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) in conjunction with the Sports Council (now Sport England) decided to review *The River Thames Leisure Policy* (1980) and prepared a comprehensive recreation strategy for the river which was published in May 1995. Since this strategy was published the Government issued the policy document 'Waterways for Tomorrow (2000)' which requires navigation authorities and local authorities to work together to deliver maximum social and economic benefit from the inland waterways. In pursuit of this the River Thames Strategic Partnership has been established and a River Thames Alliance has now been set up.
- 10.97 Because of the decline in boat traffic in the 1980s and 1990s many boatyards along the Thames were lost to alternative forms of development. The District Council acknowledges that the services these businesses provide are vital to the infrastructure of the river and once lost they are difficult to replace. The policy below therefore seeks to resist the loss of boatyards to alternative forms of development.

POLICY L17

DEVELOPMENT ON SITES ADJACENT TO THE RIVER THAMES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE THE SPECIAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITIES OF THE RIVER AND ITS MARGINS, INCLUDING ITS VALUE AS A NATURE CONSERVATION RESOURCE, ARE PROTECTED AND WHERE POSSIBLE, ENHANCED. IN PARTICULAR:

- i) NEW BUILDINGS FOR RIVER RELATED DEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO EXISTING SETTLEMENTS;**
- ii) IN THE OXFORD GREEN BELT DEVELOPMENT WILL BE LIMITED TO SMALL SCALE FACILITIES ESSENTIAL FOR A RIVER RELATED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY, AND PROVIDED SUCH DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND WITHIN AND PRESERVING THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT;**

- iii) **DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH AN ORGANISED WATER SPORT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD NOT GIVE RISE TO SERIOUS CONGESTION ON THE RIVER OR INSUPERABLE CONFLICT WITH OTHER EXISTING RIVER USES;**
- iv) **THE RE-DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING BOAT YARDS FOR OTHER USES UNRELATED TO THE RIVER WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.**

WHERE APPROPRIATE, DEVELOPMENT WILL BE REQUIRED TO INCLUDE MEASURES TO IMPROVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS ALONG, TO AND FROM THE RIVER, INCLUDING FOR THOSE WITH IMPAIRED MOBILITY AND CYCLISTS, PROVIDED THE LATTER DOES NOT HARM THE ENJOYMENT OF OTHERS, INCLUDING WALKERS.

10.98 South of the existing marina at Abingdon the Local Plan 2001 proposed an area suitable for low key water-based recreation. The District Council still considers it desirable to retain this attractive water feature which could be used for quiet informal recreation such as fishing and sailing.

POLICY L18

DEVELOPMENT NEEDED TO FACILITATE THE QUIET RECREATIONAL USE OF THE AREA SOUTH OF THE ABINGDON MARINA AS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP WILL BE PERMITTED, SUBJECT TO THE CRITERIA SET OUT IN POLICY L9 ABOVE, AND THE POLICIES IN CHAPTER 4 OF THIS PLAN.

Noisy Sports

10.99 The growth in leisure activity has led to increased interest in a variety of noisy recreational activities such as motorsports, shooting and war games, most of which require sites in the countryside. Such pursuits can cause damage to the landscape and can have a major impact on the amenity of local residents if they create excessive amounts of noise, traffic or other disturbance. They can also conflict with the interests of other users seeking to enjoy the countryside, such as walkers and riders. The provision of suitable authorised sites where activities are controlled and regulated can help to reduce such conflicts and prevent unauthorised use and damage to playing fields, footpaths, open land and woodlands. If care is taken in the choice of location, organised noisy sport provision may also help enhance or make use of degraded land. Some noisy sports have their own governing bodies which have drawn up useful codes of practice to regulate their particular activities with the aim of reducing potential conflict with other users of the countryside. The District Council welcomes such codes.

10.100 Where sporting activities are infrequent and of short duration they can usually operate with the benefit of permitted development rights. If however the land involved includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), planning permission will be required for any temporary recreational use, for war games, motorsports or

clay pigeon shooting. Where planning permission is required, the District Council will carefully consider the likely effects of the proposed activity on the amenity and rural character of the area and on any nearby residential properties or existing uses of the surrounding land. The degree of visual intrusion, noise, traffic generation and effect on public safety will be of particular concern. Where permission is granted, conditions may be imposed in order to limit the noise emanating from the activity and to reduce the visual impact of any structures required for the activity. Restrictions may also be imposed limiting the hours and days of the week during which the activity can take place.

- 10.101 Suitable sites for such activities may be found on former mineral workings or similar degraded land, provided proposals meet the criteria set out in the policy below. The District Council will also take into account the requirements of other policies in the Local Plan, where relevant, for example those which deal with the protection of the setting of listed buildings, areas of archaeological importance, ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, conservation areas, sites of importance for nature conservation and public rights of way. Policies which cover the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the North Vale Corallian Ridge may also be relevant.

POLICY L19

PROPOSALS FOR NOISY OR OTHER POTENTIALLY INTRUSIVE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY SUCH AS MOTORSPORTS, SHOOTING, WAR GAMES AND AIR SPORTS WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY:

- i) **WILL NOT CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS OR USERS OF ADJOINING OR NEARBY LAND IN TERMS OF NOISE AND DISTURBANCE, OR DETRACT FROM THE VISUAL AMENITY OF THE AREA; AND**
- ii) **HAS ADEQUATE PROVISION FOR ACCESS AND CAR PARKING.**

IN THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY AND THE NORTH VALE CORALLIAN RIDGE, THE SPECIAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF THESE AREAS WILL BE CONSERVED.

The Keeping & Rearing of Horses for Recreational Purposes

- 10.102 Horse riding for recreational purposes is a common activity in the district. There are two separate aspects of the activity as far as the need for planning permission is concerned; first the use of land, and secondly the erection of structures. The use of land for the grazing of horses is regarded as an agricultural use under the Planning Act and does not therefore require planning permission. However, if the keeping of horses, requires the erection of fences, jumps and shelters, planning

permission may be required. It is advisable to check with the District Council before carrying out any such development to ascertain if planning permission is required.

POLICY L20

DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATED WITH THE KEEPING OF HORSES FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED IT DOES NOT:

- **HARM THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE AREA;**
- **CONFLICT WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE GREEN BELT;**
- **GIVE RISE TO EXCESSIVE USE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY IN TERMS OF TRAFFIC GENERATION OR DAMAGE TO A PATH'S FABRIC OR NOISE, SMELL OR OTHER DISTURBANCES WHICH WOULD BE HARMFUL TO THE AMENITY OF NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES OR OTHER PATH USERS.**