

- 7.19 Circular 6/98 enables local planning authorities to consider whether circumstances in their areas justify seeking lower site size thresholds than 25 dwellings or 1 hectare for the provision of affordable housing. In rural areas in particular, development on small sites is a significant source of supply. The County Council will generally support the application by district councils through their local plans or local development frameworks of site thresholds lower than Circular 6/98 subject to evidence of local need, in order to help meet the overall need to provide more affordable housing in the county. Provision for affordable housing should normally be made on site to help create mixed communities. In considering the type and size of housing to be provided consideration should be given to the need for special needs or supported housing.
- 7.20 The level of need in Oxfordshire together with the limitations on funding available to deliver affordable housing, suggests that more innovative means of providing such housing will need to be found. The local planning authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek a contribution to meeting local affordable housing needs from commercial development, as well as from residential development. Consideration should also be given to innovative forms of ownership, such as co-operative housing developments, as a means of increasing the availability of affordable housing.
- 7.21 In rural areas, land within or adjoining settlements which would otherwise be considered inappropriate for development, may be released to provide affordable housing provided it is available in perpetuity to meet local needs, which is normally secured through planning conditions or obligations, and the need is justified by a local needs assessment. At the level of a particular village or parish, a needs assessment may be undertaken by the district council or local council.

8. Town centres

The principal locations for development

TC1 Development in Oxford city centre will be permitted where it maintains and enhances the sub-regional role and diversity of the centre.

Apart from Oxford city centre, the other main locations for the development of retail and other facilities will be the town centres of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Witney and Wantage.

Development in other town and district centres will be encouraged to sustain and enhance their vitality and viability.

- 8.1 PPS6³² advises that development plan documents should set out a hierarchy of centres with a strategy for locating employment, shopping, leisure and entertainment, hospitals, higher education and other uses which generate many trips and which should be well served by public transport.
- 8.2 In terms of an overall hierarchy policy TC1 identifies the sub-regional role of Oxford city centre and the towns of Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Witney and Wantage as the other main locations for new retail and other town centre development. The policy recognises the important role of the other towns in the county as employment and service centres and the need to maintain their vitality and viability and also the important function that the district centres in Oxford city perform.
- 8.3 The definition of the hierarchy for centres other than those identified in policy TC1 is a matter to be dealt with as necessary in local plans/local development frameworks. The County Council is keen that rural centres should continue to be viable.

Maintaining and enhancing centres

TC2 Major new development should be located on city or town centre sites. If there are no suitable town centre sites then edge-of-centre, followed by out-of-centre sites will be considered where the need for the development can be demonstrated, where there are no other alternatives and the development would no harm the viability of existing centres or local shops.

Proposals should sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of centres by:

- (a) extending the range and quality of shops and other central facilities;
- (b) improving the environment, character and quality of a centre;
- (c) encouraging diversity of uses, including residential accommodation; and
- (d) improving accessibility.

³² Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005.

- 8.4 PPS6 seeks to ensure that a sequential approach should be applied in selecting appropriate sites for development within centres. Policy TC2 sets out a sequential approach for locating development in centres as set out in PPS6. The sequential approach applies to retail and other key town centre uses which attract a lot of people, including commercial and public offices, entertainment and leisure facilities, hotels and other such uses.
- 8.5 The preferred location for most retail and other key town centre uses is within existing centres, both to boost their vitality and viability and because they provide greater accessibility by modes of transport other than the private car.
- 8.6 Where new edge-of-centre or out-of-centre development is proposed a developer must demonstrate need, that the sequential approach has been followed and that the development is accessible by means of transport other than the private car.
- 8.7 The increase in home shopping through the internet could in the future reduce the number of car trips and space required for parking. Town centre management provides one way of promoting the vitality and viability of existing centres. It can also assist in helping to make town centres safe and secure places, through encouraging safety and crime prevention measures.



9. Recreation and leisure

- 9.1 Government policy³³ is to maintain and promote the provision of new open space, sports and recreational facilities.
- 9.2 There is a need to balance the provision of new recreational and leisure facilities with the need to protect the environment and character of Oxfordshire. Policies recognise that conflicts can arise between those who visit the county and those who live and work in the area. The policies also focus on the creation of new facilities in areas such as restored mineral and waste disposal sites and canal and river corridors.

Proposals for new recreation and leisure facilities

- 9.3 The County Council recognises the important role that recreation plays in the well being of the community and the need to maintain existing facilities. The loss of important open space, including playing fields, is covered by policy G1 in the Plan.
- 9.4 The assessment of need for specific sports or recreation activities will be considered in detail in local plans. The provision of new supporting infrastructure including recreation, leisure, arts and community facilities associated with new development through developer contributions and in areas where there are deficiencies, is covered by policy G3 in the Plan.

Countryside recreation

- R1 The local planning authorities will encourage optimum use to be made of existing countryside recreation facilities and resources. Opportunities to create new outdoor facilities which are appropriate in scale and sensitive to a rural location will be supported.**
- 9.5 Recreational activity in the countryside is dominated by informal pursuits such as walking, cycling, outings and picnics. There is, therefore, a continuing need for the best use to be made of existing countryside recreational facilities, including public rights of way³⁴, river banks, waterways, towpaths, woodlands and parklands.

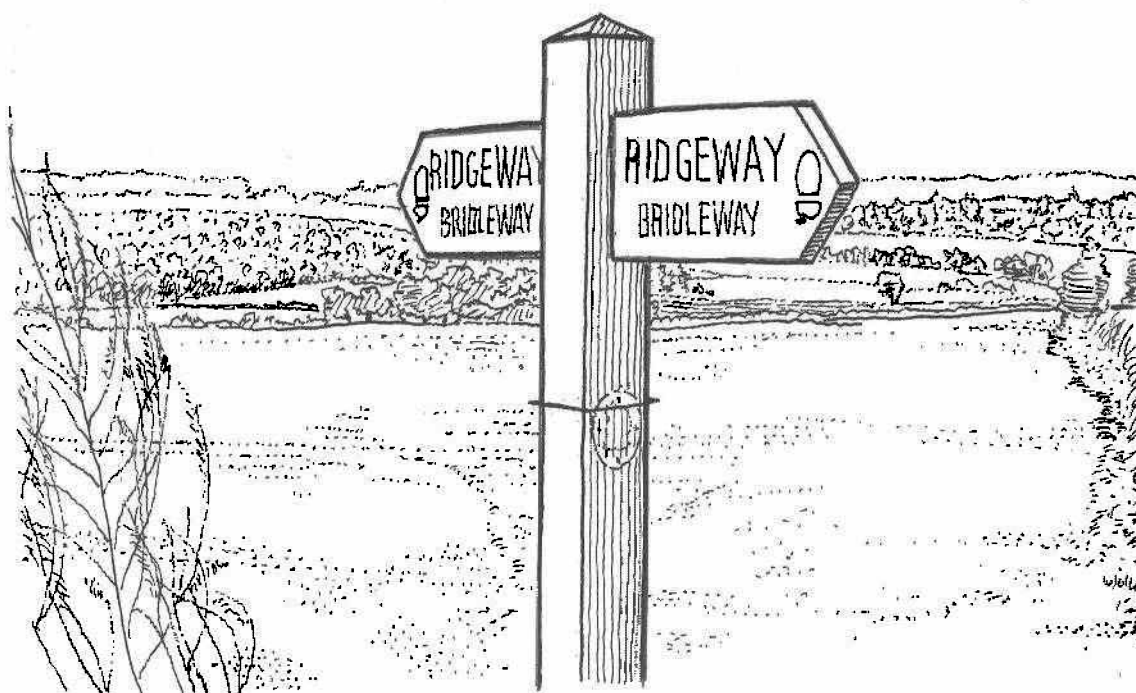
³³ Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2002.

³⁴ Rights of way are footpaths, bridleways, byways and roads used as a public path identified on the Definitive Map which is held and maintained by the County Council.

9.6 Examples of where there might be potential to create new facilities include:

- restored mineral workings and waste disposal sites, although there is a need to seek a balance between the needs of landscape and wildlife conservation and the demands for recreational water space;
- initiatives associated with the Great Western Community Forest around Swindon, which partly falls within the Vale of White Horse District;
- use of disused rail lines where they cannot be reopened for trains and could be developed as pedestrian and/or cycle routes;
- restoration of canals, such as the historic route of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal;
- improved public access and recreation facilities around waterways such as the rivers Windrush, Cherwell and Thame and the Oxford Canal.

9.7 New facilities in the countryside should not threaten rural character and sensitive ecological sites or cause highway problems and, in particular, the generation of an unacceptable volume of private car use. New facilities should be accessible by a range of modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport.



Access to the countryside and rights of way network

R2 The local planning authorities will seek to increase and improve access to the countryside.

The existing network of public rights of way, including routes in the towns, will be maintained and improved. Development which would damage the rights of way network will be resisted.

- 9.8 A priority of the County Council is to improve access to and enjoyment of the countryside and heritage, by increasing access to public rights of way, museums and other heritage sites. The County Council is working to improve public access to the countryside by protecting and enhancing the rights of way network. The County Council is also helping to implement the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and is preparing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Act will create new rights of access to certain areas of the countryside and reform and improve rights of way in England and Wales.



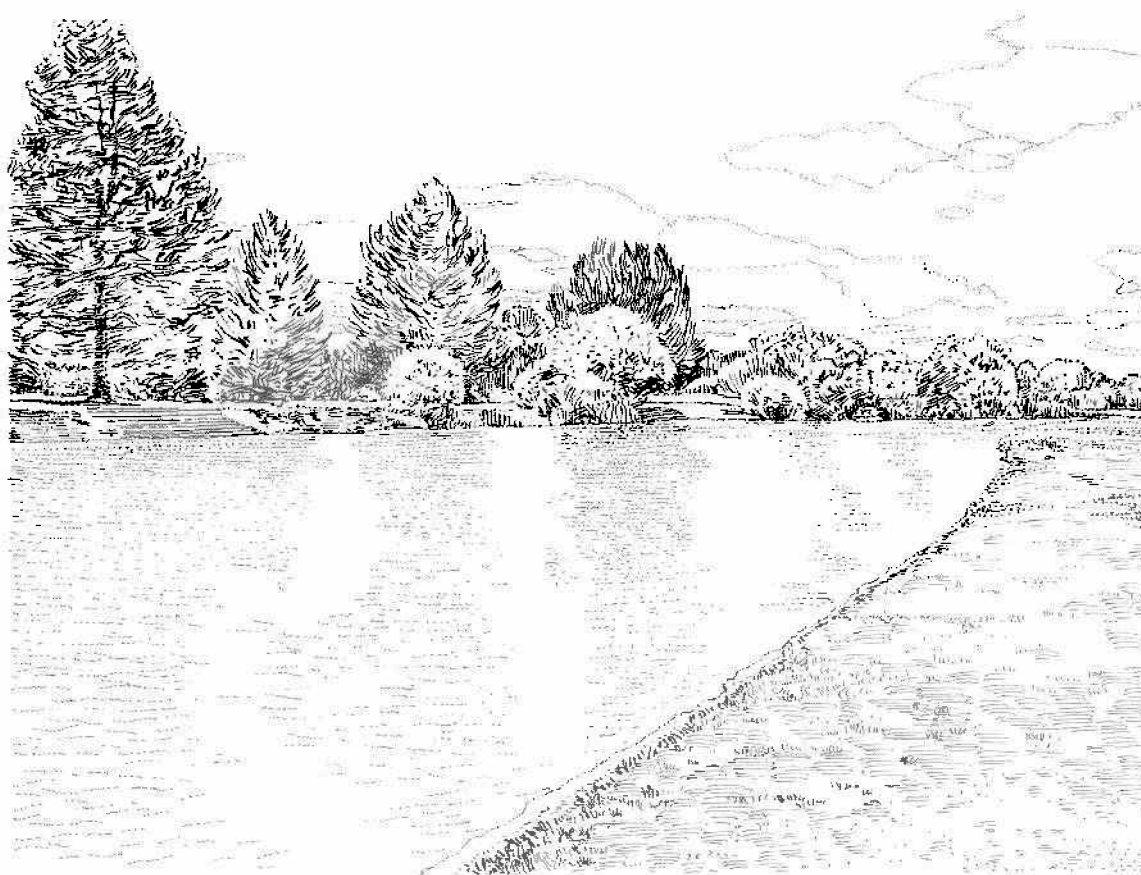
- 9.9 In appropriate cases opportunities will be taken to secure, through planning obligations, new rights of way or improvements to the existing network. Wherever increased access is proposed, care must be taken to avoid harm to adjacent land uses and areas sensitive to increased use, such as certain nature conservation sites.
- 9.10 The County Council recognises the importance of the Ridgeway national trail and is working to protect the route from damage, help ensure that users such as walkers, horse riders and cyclists can use it more easily and also protect the special character of the route. In Oxfordshire the Ridgeway runs through two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (North Wessex Downs and Chilterns).

The River Thames

R3 The character and environment of the River Thames and its immediate valley will be protected and where appropriate enhanced.

Proposals for development which will adversely affect the character of the river and its setting will not be permitted. Development that would restrict public access alongside the river will not be permitted.

- 9.11 A priority of the County Council is to promote and enhance the rivers in the county, particularly the River Thames, as a means of travel, as a tourist attraction and as a fine environmental feature. The use of the River Thames for recreational and leisure use should continue to be protected, improved and promoted, particularly where it helps to arrest the decline in the number of boat trips on the river. In appropriate locations permanent moorings on the river may be permitted.
- 9.12 The River Thames is one of Oxfordshire's most important assets in terms of environmental quality and recreational potential. The tranquil nature and character of the river and its setting will continue to be protected. Recreational development associated with the River Thames should be located within nearby towns and villages rather than in the open countryside. Increased public access alongside the river will be encouraged where appropriate.



Other waterways

- R4** The character and environment of the Oxford Canal will be protected and where appropriate enhanced.

The historic route of the Wilts and Berks Canal and appropriate alternative routes where this is not possible will be safeguarded with a view to its long-term re-establishment as a navigable waterway.

Proposals for development which will adversely affect the character or setting of these canal corridors will not be permitted.

- 9.13 The County Council is keen to protect and enhance canal corridors in the county, due to their important historical heritage and to support their role in recreation, tourism and nature conservation. The County Council supports enhanced public access and opportunities for recreation amenity provided by these waterway corridors. In appropriate cases opportunities will be taken to secure, through planning obligations, the restoration or enhancement of parts of the waterway corridors. Exact details of the existing or new routes of these canal corridors and the criteria for assessing development proposals that affect them will be addressed in the relevant Local Plans/Local Development Frameworks prepared by the district councils.