

# ***THE LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY***

## **INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT**

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- 3.1 The Government advises that development plans should have a clear strategy designed to realise the aims and objectives of the plan and to provide a clear vision of what will be achieved. The policies in this chapter, which together comprise the general strategy of the Local Plan, have three broad themes – to guide the location of development, to make the best use of land and buildings and to reduce the need to travel by car. The policies flow from, and seek to achieve, the aims set out for the Plan in Chapter 2. In particular they seek to maintain a thriving economy and enable social progress while protecting the environment and character of the area for future generations.

## **POLICIES AND PROPOSALS**

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### **The Location of Development**

- 3.2 In deciding on a strategy for guiding the location of development in the Vale, outside the Didcot area, up to 2011, the Council has looked at a number of alternatives to help it choose the most sustainable approach. Eight different options were evaluated, ranging from concentrating development on sites adjacent to the main towns on the edge of the district (including Oxford and Swindon) to dispersing it across the villages. The Council has concluded that locating most of the new development in the main settlements of Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove and Wantage and limiting it elsewhere is the most sustainable strategy. It most closely accords with the Council's aims and with national, regional and structure plan guidance. The five main settlements of the Vale already play an important role as service centres for surrounding rural communities. They contain a wide range of jobs, shops, leisure, education and other services and are relatively easily accessible to most residents of the Vale by means other than the car. Focussing development in these locations, rather than spreading it more widely, will reduce the need to travel, enhance the vitality and viability of the towns and protect the rural character of the Vale. The locational strategy, with the implications for each part of the district, is set out more fully below.

## Development in Existing Settlements

- 3.3 **The Five Main Settlements** The redevelopment of previously used land and buildings within the five main settlements will be promoted for housing, employment and other uses. However, important areas of open land – such as public open space, playing fields, amenity space, allotments and environmental corridors – will be protected from development. Proposals will be encouraged which make the best use of land and reduce the need to travel by car. Only when the Council has taken account of the amount of development within the built-up areas of the towns and villages will the phased release of greenfield land on the edges of the five main settlements be permitted.
- 3.4 Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: *Transport* advises that away from large urban areas local authorities should focus most development in or near local service centres such as market towns and that these should be defined in the development plan as the preferred locations for development. Accordingly in policy GS1 below the five main settlements in the Vale are defined as local service centres.
- 3.5 **Didcot** Didcot is identified in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan as one of the four preferred locations for development in the county. Didcot is in South Oxfordshire district but is close to the boundary with the Vale. The Structure Plan has determined that 500 of the 5,500 dwellings to be provided in the town between 1996 and 2011 will be built in the Vale as part of the town's western expansion area. In addition the Council must consider the future role of Milton Park, a large employment centre to the west of Didcot. These issues are discussed in more detail in the housing and employment chapters.
- 3.6 **The Villages** Villages are generally not sustainable locations for new development, in that most people will be likely to travel by car to jobs and services. The Council recognises, however, that some limited development can be acceptable and can help to maintain lively village communities and existing services. Using small sites within villages, particularly areas of previously developed land, can also help to reduce the need to build on greenfield sites elsewhere. For these reasons the Council will allow small-scale development within the built-up areas of villages.
- 3.7 There are some 63 rural parishes in the Vale containing a number of villages which are very varied in terms of size, location, character and the availability of services. The villages listed in policy H11 have a reasonable range of services and facilities and, within these, small groups of dwellings and small premises for business use may be permitted on land which is not important to keep open, either because it does not contribute to the rural character of the village or because it does not provide valuable recreational space. A significant change from the Local Plan to 2001 is that 'rounding off' outside the existing built-up limits of such villages will not be permitted. In the smaller villages listed in policy H12, where services and

facilities are much more limited, development of not more than four small dwellings, small extensions to existing business premises and the conversion of existing buildings will be allowed. Detailed policies for the villages are set out in later sections of the Plan. Policy GS1 below establishes the general locational strategy which underpins and provides the context for other key policies in the Plan.

## **POLICY GSI**

### **THE GENERAL LOCATIONAL STRATEGY IS TO:**

- i) CONCENTRATE DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIVE MAIN SETTLEMENTS OF ABINGDON, BOTLEY, FARINGDON, GROVE AND WANTAGE, WHICH ARE DESIGNATED AS LOCAL SERVICE CENTRES AND ARE DEFINED BY THE DEVELOPMENT BOUNDARIES ON THE PROPOSALS MAP. IMPORTANT OPEN LAND WITHIN THESE SETTLEMENTS WILL BE PROTECTED FROM DEVELOPMENT;**
- ii) LOCATE DEVELOPMENT TO THE WEST OF DIDCOT, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE WESTERN EXPANSION OF THE TOWN; AND**
- iii) ALLOW SMALL-SCALE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE BUILT-UP AREAS OF VILLAGES AS SET OUT IN POLICIES H11, H12 AND H13, PROVIDED THAT IMPORTANT AREAS OF OPEN LAND AND THEIR RURAL CHARACTER ARE PROTECTED.**

**DEVELOPMENT WHICH ACCORDS WITH THIS STRATEGY WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THERE IS NO CONFLICT WITH OTHER POLICIES IN THIS PLAN.**

### **Development in the Countryside**

- 3.8 The Government's policy, as expressed in Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, is that planning authorities should ensure that the quality and character of the wider countryside is protected and, where possible, enhanced and that natural resources should be afforded protection. Both the national guidance and the Oxfordshire Structure Plan propose strict controls over building in the countryside away from existing settlements. This is to protect the character of the countryside and to limit development in locations which would encourage the use of the private car. However, the Council recognises that some new housing to sustain social and economic activity in the rural areas will be needed but considers that as far as possible this should occur within the towns and villages or through the re-use of existing appropriate buildings. Sporadic and ribbon development, including that near major road junctions, will not be permitted. Policy GS2 below recognises that in some very limited circumstances new building will be allowed outside the built-up areas of settlements to meet the

needs of local communities (such as social housing and recreational facilities on the edge of a village), for small-scale extensions to existing properties and to support activities which are based on the land and which cannot be accommodated in a nearby settlement (for example agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation and leisure and equestrian centres). These circumstances are covered by other, more detailed policies in this Plan (including policies GS3 ii), GS6, H13, H18, CF2, L9, L13 – L20, E9 iii), and E16 – E21).

## **POLICY GS2**

**OUTSIDE THE BUILT-UP AREAS OF EXISTING SETTLEMENTS (COVERED BY POLICIES GSI, GS3, H11, H12 AND H13) NEW BUILDING WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS IT IS ON LAND WHICH HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOCAL PLAN OR IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH OTHER SPECIFIC POLICIES BELOW.**

### **Development in the Oxford Green Belt**

- 3.9 In 1975 the Oxford Green Belt was approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment as an amendment to the County Development Plan. There were areas of land around Oxford and to the north of Abingdon where the Green Belt policy operated on an interim basis to allow a detailed review of the boundaries to accommodate a limited amount of development to meet some of Oxford's housing and employment needs. The inner boundaries of the Green Belt were confirmed by the adoption of local plans: to the north of Abingdon in 1983 and around Oxford in 1991. Successive structure plans have confirmed the commitment to the Green Belt.
- 3.10 The most recent government advice specifically on Green Belts is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: *Green Belts* (PPG2). In brief this confirms that:
- i) the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness;
  - ii) the purposes of including land in Green Belts are to
    - check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
    - prevent neighbouring towns from merging together
    - safeguard the countryside from encroachment
    - preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
    - assist in urban regeneration;
  - iii) the use of land in Green Belts has a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives

- providing access to the countryside and opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation near to where people live
  - retaining and enhancing landscapes near to where people live
  - improving damaged and derelict land
  - securing nature conservation
  - retaining land in agricultural, forestry and related uses;
- iv) an essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances;
- v) there is a general presumption against inappropriate development which is harmful to the Green Belt;
- vi) the appearance of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from it; and
- vii) land between the urban area and the Green Belt can be safeguarded to meet long-term development needs.
- 3.11 The Oxfordshire Structure Plan carries forward the advice in PPG2 and establishes that the special character of Oxford and its landscape setting is not just the University and the views of the dreaming spires but is a broader concept including all the countryside around the city and the floodplains of the River Thames. Its character also depends on the overall scale of activity within this area, since significant growth will generate more traffic and pressures for further development which are likely to threaten the nature, character and setting of the city.
- 3.12 In approving the Structure Plan in 1992 the Secretary of State confirmed that the unique historic character of Oxford and its setting in its natural environment should be conserved and protected and that the growth of the city should not continue indefinitely. The panel that conducted the examination in public on the Structure Plan, approved in 1998, agreed that the Green Belt should be seen as an important strategic element in terms of sustainability and there were no circumstances to justify a review of the Green Belt so recently fully established. The District Council also takes the view that there are no exceptional circumstances which necessitate a revision of the Green Belt boundaries in this Local Plan.
- 3.13 As the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to keep land permanently open it follows that new building will be severely restricted and only allowed for a limited number of purposes. PPG2: *Green Belts* states that there is a general presumption against inappropriate development in Green Belts. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for the purposes discussed in more detail below.
- i) Agriculture and Forestry.** As much of the land in the Green Belt is used for farming and forestry it would be illogical to prevent development which is

necessary to sustain these activities. Policy E16 later in the Plan sets out the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals for new buildings associated with agriculture and forestry throughout the Vale. In the Green Belt the Council will take particular care over the siting, design, scale and visual impact of such buildings in order to maintain the openness of the Green Belt and safeguard its amenity against visually damaging development.

**ii) Outdoor Sport, Recreation and Other Uses.** Green Belts have a positive role to play in providing opportunities for people to have access to the countryside and participate in outdoor sport and recreation, much of which can be pursued without harm to the purposes of Green Belt policy. Other uses such as cemeteries and sewage works are found in Green Belts. New buildings which provide essential services and are ancillary to uses which preserve the openness of the Green Belt – such as small changing rooms for cricket, football or golf for example, or small stables – will generally be acceptable where they can be absorbed without detriment to the openness or visual amenity of the Green Belt. Particular care will be taken to ensure that the introduction of lighting, artificial surfaces and car parking associated with such facilities does not harm the openness or visual amenity of the Green Belt. New buildings which provide for indoor recreation or entertainment and stadia for football, athletics and other major sporting events will not be permitted.

**iii) The Extension, Alteration or Replacement of Existing Dwellings.** There are many existing dwellings in the Green Belt which, during the lifetime of this Local Plan, will be the subject of planning applications for some form of alteration, extension or replacement. These may be acceptable if the extension is in reasonable proportion to the size of the original building and provided the new dwelling is not materially larger than the one it is intended to replace. Care will also be taken to ensure that such proposals would not have an unacceptable impact on their surroundings and that the design of extension is compatible with the existing dwelling. The scale of extensions and increases in the size of replacement dwellings will be limited in order to safeguard the openness of the Green Belt and its visual amenities. As there are a number of small dwellings in the Green Belt, where a straight percentage increase would only enable a very small extension, the Council will operate a sliding scale so as to allow larger percentage increases of smaller dwellings as set out in policy GS3iii) below. This will give flexibility for people living in small dwellings and will help to prevent the increased erosion of the Green Belt as a result of over-large or unsympathetic extensions or replacement dwellings. The size of the existing dwellings will be taken as that at October 1995 (when the previous Local Plan was put on deposit). The measurements are to be made externally and will not include outbuildings.

**iv) Infilling in Villages.** Although there is an overall presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, it has long been recognised that limited infilling on sites within some villages washed over by the Green Belt designation would not be inappropriate. This is recognised in PPG2, paragraphs

2.11 and 3.4, and Structure Plan (2011) policy EN5. The designated village areas where limited infilling will be allowed are shown on the proposals map at Farmoor, Shippon, South Hinksey, Sunningwell, Wootton Old Village and Wytham. Where infilling in these areas is for housing, it will be allowed provided the scheme is for no more than one or two dwellings or is for a small group of dwellings to provide low-cost housing to local people in perpetuity in accordance with policy H18 and provided that there is no harm to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt. Low-cost housing for local people will not be allowed outside the defined village boundaries unless it is through the conversion of an existing building in accordance with policy GS7 below.

**v) Re-use of Buildings.** Over time it is inevitable that some buildings in the Green Belt will become unsuited to, or redundant from, their present use. With suitable safeguards the re-use of existing buildings should not prejudice the openness of the Green Belt as the buildings are already there. In some cases an alternative use can help to secure the continuing stewardship of Green Belt land by helping farmers to diversify their enterprises. To be acceptable policy GS3 below makes it clear that the new use should not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it. In addition proposals will be expected to meet the requirements set out in policies GS7 and GS8 below for the re-use of rural buildings.

**vi) Changes in the Use of Land and Engineering Operations.** Proposals involving the change of use of land and the carrying out of engineering and other operations will only be acceptable if they maintain the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes. Mineral working, according to Government advice, need not be regarded as inappropriate development. Policies for this type of development are contained in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan prepared by Oxfordshire County Council.

**vii) Limited Infilling or Redevelopment at Existing Major Developed Sites.** The Oxford Green Belt contains some major developed sites which pre-date the Green Belt designation. PPG2 recognises that limited infilling at such sites may help to secure jobs and prosperity without further prejudicing the Green Belt and that complete or partial redevelopment may offer the opportunity for environmental improvement. The Council has identified nine major developed sites in its part of the Oxford Green Belt: Dalton Barracks north-west of Abingdon; Farmoor and Swinford water treatment works and Oaken Holt Nursing Home in the parish of Cumnor; Radley College north of Abingdon; Templeton College and Westminster Institute of Education to the south and west of Oxford; Cothill School in Marcham parish and Chandlings Manor, a school in the parish of Kennington. These are shown on the proposals map. Limited infilling and the partial redevelopment of sites will be allowed at all of the major developed sites, subject to the criteria in policy GS4 below. Not all the land identified within the boundaries of the major developed sites will be suitable for new buildings. Within the boundaries, the setting of the existing buildings, sense of place and the character of a particular

area must be taken into account. The Council considers there is no justification on environmental grounds for promoting the complete redevelopment of any of the major developed sites in its area. This is because, in the main, they are occupied by successful enterprises of long standing, which are housed in adequate buildings. No policy framework is advanced to deal with such developments and, although applications will be treated as departures from the development plan, policies GS3 and GS4 will be taken into account. Applications for infilling and the partial redevelopment of major developed sites should be put forward in the context of a comprehensive long-term plan for the site as a whole. They should seek to bring about environmental improvements both to the visual amenities of the Green Belt and its openness. The latter can be achieved by locating new buildings so as to avoid dispersal across the site and siting new buildings close to existing ones. In most cases the boundaries of the major developed sites have been drawn tightly around the present extent of existing buildings. However, in the case of Templeton College the boundary has been drawn to enable the extension of the college in accordance with a planning permission that has already been granted.

- 3.14 The policies below set out the Council's general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt, and the limited circumstances under which new buildings might be permitted, including infilling and the partial redevelopment of existing major developed sites. The Council understands the aspirations of Oxford Brookes University who may wish to extend the built-up area outside the boundary of the major developed site on land owned by the Westminster Institute at Harcourt Hill to cater for an increase in student numbers and enable the modernisation and improvement of the current facilities. However, plans for the development of the whole university are not yet at a stage when they can be fully justified or assessed in the context of the impact on the Green Belt or the purposes of including land within it. The issue will be reassessed when the local plan is next reviewed (as a local development document under the new arrangements) or through a planning application (using the departure procedures) if a sound case can be made to extend the higher educational facilities at the site in the meantime. The Council would oppose any new buildings to the north east of the major developed site boundary as shown on the proposals map.

### **POLICY GS3**

**DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING THE CHANGE OF USE OF LAND AND ENGINEERING AND OTHER OPERATIONS) WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF IT DOES NOT CONFLICT WITH THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND IN THE GREEN BELT AND IF IT PRESERVES ITS OPENNESS AND THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF OXFORD AND ITS LANDSCAPE SETTING.**

**SUBJECT TO THE ABOVE CRITERIA NEW BUILDING WILL ONLY BE ALLOWED FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:**

- i) **AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY;**



- ii) **SMALL-SCALE FACILITIES ESSENTIAL FOR OUTDOOR SPORT, RECREATION, CEMETERIES AND OTHER USES OF LAND WHICH PRESERVE THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT;**
- iii) **LIMITED EXTENSION, ALTERATION OR REPLACEMENT OF EXISTING DWELLINGS. AN EXTENSION TO OR THE REPLACEMENT OF A DWELLING WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IF IT EXCEEDS THE FOLLOWING LIMITS:**
  - a) **EXISTING DWELLINGS WITH A FLOORSPACE OF LESS THAN 80 SQUARE METRES – UP TO 50% OF THE ORIGINAL VOLUME OF THE DWELLING (EXCLUDING OUTBUILDINGS);**
  - b) **EXISTING DWELLINGS WITH A FLOORSPACE OF 81–120 SQUARE METRES – UP TO 40% OF THE ORIGINAL VOLUME OF THE DWELLING (EXCLUDING OUTBUILDINGS);**
  - c) **EXISTING DWELLINGS WITH A FLOORSPACE GREATER THAN 121 SQUARE METRES – UP TO 30% OF THE ORIGINAL VOLUME OF THE DWELLING (EXCLUDING OUTBUILDINGS); AND**
- iv) **LIMITED INFILLING BETWEEN EXISTING BUILT DEVELOPMENT IN THE VILLAGES OF FARMOOR, SHIPPON, SOUTH HINKSEY, SUNNINGWELL, WOOTTON OLD VILLAGE AND WYTHAM, AS DEFINED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP. RESIDENTIAL INFILLING WILL BE LIMITED TO SCHEMES OF 1 OR 2 DWELLINGS UNLESS IT IS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY H18.**

**PROPOSALS FOR THE CONVERSION AND ADAPTATION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS SHOULD NOT HAVE A MATERIALLY GREATER IMPACT THAN THE EXISTING OR PREVIOUS USE ON THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT OR THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND IN IT.**

**THE VISUAL AMENITIES OF THE GREEN BELT WILL BE PROTECTED FROM DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OR CONSPICUOUS FROM THE GREEN BELT WHICH MIGHT BE HARMFUL BY REASON OF ITS SITING, SCALE OR DESIGN.**

#### **POLICY GS4**

**LIMITED INFILLING AND THE PARTIAL REDEVELOPMENT OF SITES WILL BE PERMITTED WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NINE MAJOR DEVELOPED SITES OF DALTON BARRACKS, FARMOOR AND SWINFORD WATER TREATMENT WORKS, RADLEY COLLEGE, TEMPLETON COLLEGE, WESTMINSTER INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, COTHILL SCHOOL, CHANDLINGS MANOR AND OAKEN HOLT NURSING HOME, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, PROVIDED THAT:**

- i) THERE WOULD BE NO GREATER IMPACT ON THE OPENNESS OF THE GREEN BELT OR THE PURPOSES OF INCLUDING LAND WITHIN IT;
- ii) ANY INFILLING RELATES TO THE CONTINUING USE OF THE SITE;
- iii) ANY PARTIAL REDEVELOPMENT IS CONSISTENT WITH APPROPRIATE COMPREHENSIVE LONG TERM PLANS FOR THE SITE AS A WHOLE WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE USE OF LAND IN GREEN BELTS;
- iv) THE BUILDINGS WOULD NOT EXCEED THE HEIGHT OF EXISTING BUILDINGS;
- v) IT WOULD NOT LEAD TO A MAJOR INCREASE IN THE DEVELOPED PROPORTION OF THE SITE; AND
- vi) IT WOULD NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE.

WHERE PROPOSALS FOR PARTIAL REDEVELOPMENT INVOLVE AN ISOLATED BUILDING ITS RE-SITING WITHIN THE MAIN GROUP OF BUILDINGS ON THE SITE WILL BE SOUGHT OR, FAILING THAT, IMMEDIATELY ALONGSIDE THEM. IN SUCH CASES IT WILL BE A REQUIREMENT THAT THE EXISTING ISOLATED BUILDING IS DEMOLISHED AND THAT ANY DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS ACCRUING TO IT ARE EXTINGUISHED.

## **Making Efficient Use of Land and Buildings**

- 3.15 Two closely interlinking themes of Government policy in recent years have been to maximise the re-use of previously developed land and buildings and to avoid the inefficient use of land especially by promoting higher densities of development. These objectives are being pursued to promote urban regeneration, help sustain local services and public transport, conserve natural resources and minimise the amount of greenfield and other open land being taken for development. Previously developed land is defined in Government advice as that which is occupied by a permanent structure and associated fixed surface infrastructure. It excludes land and buildings used for agriculture or forestry; land such as parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land which was used previously where the remains of a structure or activity have blended into the landscape. The advice acknowledges that it will not always be appropriate for the whole of a previously developed site to be redeveloped, especially where there is open land within the site.

### **Land and Buildings Within Settlements**

- 3.16 The Council is concerned at the continued loss of countryside to development in the district and is anxious to keep such loss to a minimum. Much housing development built in the Vale for example has been at densities of about 25 dwellings per hectare (10 to the acre) although in recent years higher densities

have been achieved. The Government has pointed out that more than half of all new housing being built in England is at densities less than 20 dwellings per hectare. This represents a high level of land take which cannot be sustained in the long term. Accordingly the Council will encourage developments which make the most efficient use of land especially in the five main settlements where there is good access to a range of jobs, services and public transport. Such development does not have to be cramped or high rise, but it does have to be to a high standard of design to achieve good quality environments for living, working and socialising. Where a site is close to the town centre or on a good public transport route for example it may be possible to achieve higher density schemes by reducing normal car parking requirements and by innovative designs. For housing schemes it may be possible to reduce the amount of private amenity space and increase the number of small units within a scheme. However, to be acceptable, high density developments must not be harmful to the character or amenity of the surrounding areas.

- 3.17 In the rural areas development densities are unlikely to be as high as in the main settlements because respect for village character will often rule this out and the mechanisms for achieving higher densities, such as reduced car parking standards, are unlikely to be appropriate. Policy GS5 below seeks to promote the re-use of previously developed and unused land and buildings in the Vale's towns and villages. Care will be taken to ensure that such development does not harm the site or its surroundings, including features of nature conservation value and historic interest.

#### **POLICY GS5**

**WITHIN EXISTING SETTLEMENTS DEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF IT MAKES EFFICIENT USE OF LAND AND BUILDINGS AND PROVIDED IT WOULD NOT RESULT IN:**

- i) THE LOSS OF AN IMPORTANT LOCAL FACILITY;**
- ii) HARM TO THE SITE OR ITS SURROUNDINGS; OR**
- iii) A POOR QUALITY ENVIRONMENT FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN, WORK IN, OR VISIT THE VALE.**

#### **Redevelopment of Buildings Outside Settlements**

- 3.18 While the Council is committed to developing previously developed land in the main settlements, it recognises the position is more complex for such sites in the countryside. Generally the Council will only allow new buildings on previously developed sites in the countryside where they comply with policy GS2 (that is, they are allocated for development or are covered by specific policies in this Plan) or where they are currently occupied by permanent buildings, provided they are not in agricultural or forestry use or are associated with parks, recreation grounds and allotments. On sites in the countryside which have been developed previously

but do not contain any buildings, or where the remains of buildings have blended into the landscape, new building will not be allowed. The only occasions where the fact that a site is previously developed can be used to justify the construction of a new building is where it involves the redevelopment of existing buildings which meet the criteria in policy GS6. This is consistent with the approach to protect the landscape character of the Vale and prevent a dispersal of development which would be difficult to serve by means other than the private car. It reflects long established planning policies which say that permission should not normally be given for isolated development in the countryside.

- 3.19 Policy GS6 below establishes that to be acceptable the redevelopment of buildings in the countryside must involve existing buildings of permanent and substantial construction. To prevent the loss of existing buildings which add to the understanding of the local history of the area and the landscape, the demolition of listed buildings will not be permitted. The Council accepts that in some circumstances farm and forestry buildings can be re-used for other purposes by virtue of the fact that the buildings are already there. However, the Council believes there is no justification to redevelop those buildings, either because they have come to the end of their life or for greater commercial profit, if they are not in locations where new buildings for non agricultural purposes would normally be allowed. The exception to this will be where redevelopment is needed for farm diversification in accordance with policy E17.
- 3.20 Dwellings are a scarce commodity in the countryside and command high land values which tend to exclude other uses. They also have a significant impact on the landscape by virtue of gardens and ancillary buildings. Given this context the construction of new dwellings on previously developed land in the countryside will only be allowed where they replace existing dwellings and then only on a one for one basis, or where the redevelopment of existing buildings is for a new use where an additional dwelling is essential for the functioning of the proposed new use and is ancillary to it. In these cases the dwellings will be tied to the overall development so they cannot be sold separately from it. Replacement dwellings in the countryside will be considered in accordance with policies GS6 and GS3 where they are in the Green Belt.
- 3.21 The redevelopment should not have a materially greater visual impact on its surroundings than the current building and opportunities will be taken to improve the appearance of the land, especially by clearing away unsightly structures and improving the landscape. Similarly the use proposed should be no less sustainable than the current use, otherwise it could lead to a significant intensification of activity in an unsustainable location. Generally the new buildings should occupy the same position as the existing ones unless an alternative location would have clear benefits in terms of its effect on the landscape. For example this could be siting a replacement building close to an existing building to be retained or in a less conspicuous, well-screened location.

## **POLICY GS6**

**OUTSIDE THE BUILT-UP AREA OF SETTLEMENTS, THE REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING BUILDINGS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED WHERE:**

- i) THE EXISTING BUILDINGS ARE OF PERMANENT AND SUBSTANTIAL CONSTRUCTION AND ARE NOT THE SUBJECT OF A TEMPORARY PERMISSION;**
- ii) THE EXISTING BUILDINGS WERE NOT ORIGINALLY CONSTRUCTED FOR AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY (UNLESS IT IS PART OF A GENUINE FARM DIVERSIFICATION SCHEME IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY E17);**
- iii) IT DOES NOT INVOLVE THE CREATION OF AN ADDITIONAL DWELLING UNLESS IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT AND IS ANCILLARY TO IT;**
- iv) IT IS FOR A NEW DWELLING WHICH REPLACES AN EXISTING DWELLING AND THEN ONLY ON A ONE-FOR-ONE BASIS, SUBJECT TO THE SIZE LIMITS SET OUT IN POLICY GS3 iii) ABOVE FOR DWELLINGS IN THE GREEN BELT, AND FOR DWELLINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE THE GREEN BELT BY UP TO 50% OF THE VOLUME OF THE ORIGINAL DWELLING EXCLUDING OUTBUILDINGS;**
- v) THE REDEVELOPMENT WOULD NOT HAVE A MATERIALLY GREATER VISUAL IMPACT ON THE COUNTRYSIDE THAN THE CURRENT BUILDINGS, AND WHERE POSSIBLE WOULD HAVE LESS;**
- vi) THE NEW USE PROPOSED WOULD BE AT LEAST AS SUSTAINABLE AS THE CURRENT USE; AND**
- vii) IT IS ON THE SITE OF THE EXISTING BUILDINGS UNLESS AN ALTERNATIVE SITE WOULD HAVE CLEAR BENEFITS IN TERMS OF IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE.**

### **Re-use of Buildings Outside Settlements**

- 3.22 The countryside of the Vale away from settlements contains many buildings, some of traditional vernacular construction and others not. They include mills, schools, chapels, agricultural and industrial buildings. Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* (PPS7) advises that the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed rural buildings has an important role in meeting the needs of rural areas where this would meet sustainable development objectives. This can reduce demands for new building in the countryside and avoid leaving existing buildings vacant and prone to vandalism and dereliction. However, balanced against this is the need to protect the countryside,

which includes not perpetuating the use of existing buildings which detract from the landscape, and preventing activities which would be harmful to the countryside. There is also concern that the conversion of buildings in the countryside may not be sustainable in terms of reducing the need to travel, as most people using the buildings are likely to need to travel by car for all or most of their journeys.

- 3.23 There is general consensus that buildings in the countryside of traditional, vernacular construction tend to be in keeping with their surroundings and should be retained and re-used. Vernacular buildings reflect local building styles and materials and many make an important contribution to the landscape and to understanding the history of the area. However, most modern buildings, including large portal frame or prefabricated buildings, or those built using unsympathetic materials, such as concrete blocks, asbestos sheeting or corrugated iron, cannot be said to make an important contribution to the landscape or our understanding of it and it is questionable whether they can be regarded as in keeping with their surroundings. Developers often argue that because these types of building have been part of the rural scene for some years they must be in keeping with the countryside. The Council does not accept this view and in deciding what is a suitably constructed rural building believes a more discerning approach is necessary.
- 3.24 To reflect these concerns the Council is proposing two policies for the re-use of rural buildings in the countryside. The first is for vernacular buildings where, subject to certain safeguards, new uses will generally be allowed. The second is for non-vernacular buildings where additional tests will have to be met before re-use will be permitted.
- 3.25 Proposals for the re-use of any building in the countryside which is derelict, or in such poor structural condition that it could not be used without substantial alteration or rebuilding, will not be permitted. Similarly proposals involving substantial alterations and extensions that would be tantamount to the erection of a new building will not be permitted. Such development would be contrary to Government advice and to the policies in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. Where a derelict building has been substantially re-built, prior to a planning application being submitted for a change of use in an attempt to circumvent this policy, planning permission is unlikely to be granted for the new use. To ensure that proposals can be assessed properly and speedily, applications for the change of use of buildings in the countryside should include detailed survey drawings of the original building, clearly showing those elements to be replaced, altered or removed and the impact of any new work proposed. In some cases applicants will need to submit a structural report to show that the building is capable of withstanding the alterations and the new use proposed. Government advice indicates that new building is to be strictly controlled in the countryside and consequently only small-scale extensions will be permitted where it is essential to achieve an appropriate conversion which would not otherwise be possible. The change of use of listed

buildings will also be considered in the light of policy HE7 and policy GS3 will also be taken into account in the Green Belt.

- 3.26 It is critical that the new uses proposed for vernacular buildings in the countryside respect the character and appearance of both the building and the wider area. For this reason the policy does not seek to favour one type of use over another as much will depend upon the impact of the use on the nature of the building and its setting. Conversion to residential use often involves major changes to the fabric of the building, its external appearance and its setting in the landscape. Traditional barns for example are simple structures, enclosing large open spaces without windows or chimneys, and, if not handled carefully, changes of such buildings to residential use can radically alter their character and appearance. In addition a residential use often involves the enclosure of adjoining land to form a garden and the erection of garden sheds, garages and other domestic structures which can have a harmful effect on the setting of the building and the character of the countryside, especially in areas of high quality landscape. In some cases the conversion of such buildings for holiday accommodation may be more acceptable as this may not require the same design standards or external ancillary facilities. The conversion of buildings to employment uses can, if handled with care, have less impact on the fabric and appearance of the buildings and may benefit rural communities by providing job opportunities locally. However, control needs to be exercised to ensure that the use of such buildings for business activities does not lead to a decline in the quality of the countryside through, for example, the scale of the activity, unsympathetic fencing, external storage and lighting, vehicle parking and noise, or through an unacceptable increase in traffic on rural roads. The Council will expect conversions for employment use to provide small-scale premises of up to 500 square metres or to be for a firm whose linkages make the particular location necessary in accordance with Structure Plan policy E4.
- 3.27 Whatever the use proposed it will be important to ensure that the necessary services and facilities are available or can be provided without overall harm to the environment. In particular a well established and adequate access road should be available from the building to the public highway network.
- 3.28 Buildings in the countryside are often used by barn owls and bats which are protected species (see policy NE5). A survey should be made of the building and any necessary measures to protect important species during and after the conversion work should be established before a planning application for re-use is submitted. This will enable the application to be processed speedily.

## **POLICY GS7**

**OUTSIDE THE BUILT-UP AREA OF SETTLEMENTS THE RE-USE AND ADAPTATION OF VERNACULAR BUILDINGS WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED ALL THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE MET:**

- i) **THE BUILDING IS OF PERMANENT AND SUBSTANTIAL CONSTRUCTION AND IS CAPABLE OF CONVERSION WITHOUT MAJOR REBUILDING, EXTENSION OR ALTERATION;**
- ii) **THE RE-USE AND ADAPTATION WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING, ITS SETTING OR THE SURROUNDING AREA; AND**
- iii) **ANY SERVICES AND FACILITIES, INCLUDING ACCESS ROADS, NECESSARY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT ARE AVAILABLE OR CAN BE PROVIDED WITHOUT OVERALL HARM TO THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA.**

3.29 The re-use of non-vernacular buildings in the countryside must comply with the criteria in policy GS7 above and a number of additional tests discussed below. The buildings, although not vernacular, must be in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. The buildings should be structurally sound and appropriate for the use proposed. The buildings should be fully enclosed with walls and a roof and not require external cladding, otherwise the Council will consider that the requirements of policy GS7 criterion i) cannot be met. The re-use of non-vernacular buildings will be allowed where it is part of a genuine farm diversification scheme which adds value to the goods produced on the farm or where it is in association with a countryside use that cannot reasonably be located in a nearby settlement (e.g. a golf course, equestrian centre or other outdoor recreational use).

3.30 The majority of proposals to re-use non-vernacular buildings will be for some form of business use and this raises concerns in three key respects. The first is the effect of the change of use on the character of the building and its setting in the countryside. When such buildings are seen in the context of a working farmyard they are part of the rural scene. However, when all or most of the buildings in a farm complex change to business use they can take on the character and appearance of an industrial estate. The second concern arises over the dispersal of activity into areas where access by public transport, walking and cycling can be difficult. This encourages the use of the private car which is contrary to PPG13 and other government guidance on creating sustainable developments. The third concern relates to the scale of use. Given the number of farm complexes with large aggregate floor areas and the significant amount of land and buildings already available for business use in the district as a whole, a proliferation of business uses in the countryside could lead to an overheating of the local economy and undermine the policies of restraint in the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. For these reasons the Council will limit the floor space that can be re-used for business purposes in a group of non-vernacular buildings to 500 square metres in total. The conversion of non-vernacular isolated buildings will generally not be allowed as they are not considered to be in keeping with their surroundings and their conversion is unlikely to produce sustainable developments. This is consistent



with the approach of encouraging small businesses in rural areas while protecting the character and environment of the Vale.

- 3.31 The Council will also ensure that the conversion of a building would not give rise to the need for additional buildings in the countryside to replace it. Where a farm building proposed for re-use was constructed under permitted development rights, applicants will be required to provide evidence of the original agricultural justification for its construction and of its subsequent agricultural use to demonstrate those rights are not being abused. Where the building was erected after 1 April 1997 and its agricultural use ceases within 10 years, the Council is seldom likely to permit its re-use.

## **POLICY GS8**

**OUTSIDE THE BUILT-UP AREA OF SETTLEMENTS THE RE-USE AND ADAPTATION OF NON-VERNACULAR BUILDINGS WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THE CRITERIA IN POLICY GS7 CAN BE MET, AND:**

- i) THE FORM, BULK AND GENERAL DESIGN OF THE BUILDING IS IN KEEPING WITH THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF ITS SURROUNDINGS;**
  - ii) IT IS SUSTAINABLY LOCATED FOR THE SCALE AND TYPE OF USE PROPOSED;**
  - iii) IT WOULD NOT RESULT IN THE CREATION OF A DWELLING;**
  - iv) WHERE CONVERSION TO BUSINESS USE IS PROPOSED THE TOTAL BUSINESS FLOORSPEACE WOULD NOT EXCEED 500 SQUARE METRES IN THE GROUP OF BUILDINGS WITHIN WHICH IT IS LOCATED, UNLESS IT FORMS PART OF A FARM DIVERSIFICATION SCHEME IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY E17; AND**
  - v) THE CONVERSION WOULD NOT GIVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR REPLACEMENT BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.**
- 3.32 To ensure that developments remain small scale and their visual impact is minimised the Council will consider imposing conditions or seeking planning obligations to restrict the future expansion of business premises and secure environmental improvements. The Council may also seek to prevent the fragmentation of a farm holding, when a diversification scheme is proposed, or the separation of a dwelling conversion from the enterprise upon which it was originally justified. There are areas of the Vale where the local landscape is particularly sensitive and where the impact of new buildings could be seriously detrimental in visual terms. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a key area in this respect but there are other areas in the

countryside where new building requires careful control. The Council is concerned that the grant of planning permission for the re-use of an existing building should not be followed by an extension of that building under permitted development rights or a replacement farm building, as these could have a detrimental impact on the landscape. To prevent this the Council may, in appropriate circumstances, seek to remove permitted development rights to extend a converted building in the countryside or to erect new farm buildings elsewhere on the farm. Although it will seldom be necessary to restrict the permitted development rights on the whole of a farm holding it may be appropriate on a small farm or where the re-use of a number of buildings is being sought. Permitted development rights may also be withdrawn where a change of use between one use class and another could have a harmful effect on the environment. This could arise, for example, if a building used as an office or for research and development changed to warehousing and distribution. The removal of permitted development rights does not mean that buildings cannot be extended or new farm buildings erected but that planning permission has to be sought. The conditions set out in policy GS9 below will only be imposed where they are justified and are fairly and reasonably related to the proposed development.

## **POLICY GS9**

**WHEN GRANTING PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE RE-USE OF A BUILDING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE CONDITIONS MAY BE IMPOSED OR A PLANNING OBLIGATION SOUGHT TO COVER THE FOLLOWING:**

- i) TO TIE THE BUILDING TO THE HOLDING TO DISCOURAGE FRAGMENTATION WHERE IT IS PART OF A FARM DIVERSIFICATION SCHEME;**
- ii) IN A MIXED USE SCHEME, TO TIE A PROPOSED CONVERSION TO A DWELLING TO THE OTHER USE(S) ON THE SITE WHERE THE CONVERSION WOULD NOT OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN PERMITTED AND TO PREVENT ITS OCCUPATION BEFORE THE OTHER USE IS SECURED;**
- iii) WHERE BUSINESS USE IS PROPOSED, TO ENSURE THAT THE ACCOMMODATION REMAINS AVAILABLE FOR SMALL FIRMS (UP TO ABOUT 500 SQUARE METRES) OR FOR FIRMS WHOSE SOURCES OF SUPPLY, COMMERCIAL LINKAGES, LABOUR SUPPLY AND MARKETS MAKE THE SPECIFIC LOCATION NECESSARY FOR THEM;**
- iv) TO REMOVE PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS TO EXTEND THE BUILDING AND/OR CHANGE USES BETWEEN DIFFERENT CLASSES OF THE USE CLASSES ORDER;**
- v) TO WITHDRAW PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS FOR NEW FARM BUILDINGS ON THE HOLDING OR PART OF THE HOLDING WHERE THE SCHEME MAY LEAD**

**TO A PROLIFERATION OF BUILDINGS WHICH WOULD HARM THE LANDSCAPE;  
AND**

- vi) **TO SECURE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING AND ITS  
SURROUNDINGS.**

### **Minimising the Need to Travel by Car and Reducing the Impact of Traffic**

- 3.33 There is widespread concern that increased numbers of cars and goods vehicles has led to congestion, noise and air pollution and has diminished the viability of some public transport services. The principal responsibility for transport matters rests with the Department for Transport, the County Council and the public transport providers. The District Council's involvement extends to the provision and operation of public off-street car parks, influencing the location and nature of new developments and involvement in integrated transport studies for the main settlements. A fundamental element of the Council's local plan strategy will be to ensure that new developments occur in locations where the need to travel (in particular by car) can be reduced. It will also be important to ensure that new footpaths, cycleways and public transport facilities are, where possible, provided in association with new developments. Policy GS10 below reflects these aims and further details are given in the transport chapter. The approach is consistent with national guidance and structure plan policies and it underpins many of the policies guiding the location of development in this Local Plan.

### **POLICY GS10**

**NEW DEVELOPMENT WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IN LOCATIONS WHERE THE NEED TO TRAVEL, PARTICULARLY BY CAR, CAN BE MINIMISED OR WHERE IT IS SPECIFICALLY PROVIDED FOR IN OTHER POLICIES IN THIS PLAN. DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD GENERATE SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF TRAFFIC WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE TRAVEL BY MODES OTHER THAN THE PRIVATE CAR ARE NOT AVAILABLE OR CANNOT BE PROVIDED FOR EFFECTIVELY.**