

COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING CONTEXT

- 9.1 This chapter of the Plan is concerned with the use and release of land for community services and facilities in the interests of local residents and the wider environment. It is not a programme for future provision, but sets out general policies against which planning applications for community services and facilities which involve land or buildings can be judged by the District Council.
- 9.2 The quality and convenience of everyday life is greatly influenced by the nature and extent of community services and facilities such as local schools, community halls, hospitals and public utilities. The provision and retention of such services and facilities are therefore important elements of this Plan as will be seen by reference to the Plan's aims. In particular, the Council wishes 'to promote high quality sustainable development' (aim 2) and 'to maintain and improve the quality of life of all members of the local community' (aim 4).

Role of the District Council and Others

- 9.3 Many organisations are involved in the planning, provision and running of community services and facilities. As well as the District Council these include: the County Council, responsible for education, libraries, social services and the fire service; town and parish councils, often responsible for halls, cemeteries and allotments and who also identify local need; and private and voluntary organisations and societies. At the wider level there are bodies like the Thames Valley Police Authority, the Oxfordshire Health Authority which administers the community hospitals and the Oxfordshire Family Health Services Authority which controls provision of primary health care facilities.
- 9.4 The District Council itself has a variety of roles: as local planning authority it deals with planning applications for community services and facilities, taking into account the policies in the Local Plan and those of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan. At the same time it is a provider of some services, for example, the public halls in Abingdon and Wantage. The Council also makes available financial assistance to help with the development or improvement of facilities such as local halls and other community buildings and gives grants to a variety of community organisations. The Council through agency and contract arrangements is also responsible for refuse collection and street cleaning.
- 9.5 Other services such as electricity, telephones and gas are provided by the various private companies which increasingly are becoming providers of more than one

service. Water supply and water treatment in the Vale remain the responsibility of Thames Water. The land use requirements of these companies can range from the location of small-scale apparatus to major projects. Thames Water, for example, is responsible for a major new water supply pipeline from Swinford to Blunsden and is currently investigating a new reservoir proposal in the Steventon/East Hanney area.

Planning Guidance from Central Government

- 9.6 Government advice in Planning Policy Statement 12: *Local Development Frameworks* (PPS12) confirms that the purpose of planning is to co-ordinate development with the services it requires, like education, health and other community facilities. In PPS1: *Delivering Sustainable Development* the government emphasises development plans should promote development that creates socially inclusive communities, including suitable mixes of housing and that plan policies should ensure that the impact of development on the social fabric of communities is considered and taken into account. Government advice in PPG3: *Housing* confirms that authorities 'should create more sustainable patterns of development by building in ways which exploit and deliver... education and health facilities, and local services'. The Local Plan has a pivotal role to play in relation to all these objectives.

The Oxfordshire Structure Plan

- 9.7 The Government's general approach is reflected in the wording of the policies in the Oxfordshire Structure Plans to 2011 and to 2016. For example, policy G3 states that development proposals will not be permitted unless community facilities and service improvements will be provided whilst policy H1 seeks to ensure that most development takes place where a reasonable range of community facilities exist or can be provided in association with new housing development.

The Local Plan Policies

- 9.8 The Local Plan puts forward a range of policies to govern the provision of community services in accordance with the government guidance and structure plan policies outlined above. The Plan can facilitate the provision of services and facilities in appropriate cases by safeguarding sites. It can also identify at an early stage the need for contributions from new development towards facilities, ensuring that the need is taken into account by developers at the design stage. It must however be recognised that many works carried out by the utility companies can be carried out as permitted development (subject to environmental impact assessment) without the need for planning permission.
- 9.9 Within the context of policies similar to those put forward in this Plan, sites have been found in recent years for a range of facilities to serve the growing population of the Vale. These include the health centres at Wantage and

Faringdon and the foyer scheme at Abingdon, which provides training facilities and accommodation for young people. This Local Plan however, must look to the future. Central Government's policy of 'care in the community' means that facilities such as residential homes for the elderly and 'group homes' or hostels providing accommodation for mentally handicapped people or others in need of rehabilitation may need to be provided (see policy H19). Changing work patterns have seen a greater requirement for day nurseries for young children. It is important that the right planning policy framework is in place to deal with the land use implications of this kind of change.

- 9.10 The policies set out below aim to provide a framework to safeguard and make the best use of existing community services and facilities and to facilitate new provision to meet the needs of all people. In pursuit of these aims, it will be vital to safeguard the amenities of residents and to ensure that any future development is well-designed and of a high environmental standard.

POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

Protection of Existing Services and Facilities

- 9.11 The Council will resist development proposals involving the loss of existing services and facilities, unless the proposal includes alternative provision sufficient to meet identified community needs. Developers will be encouraged to retain or enhance community uses on established sites unless alternative provision exists or is made available at an adequate standard elsewhere in the locality.

POLICY CF1

PROPOSALS INVOLVING THE LOSS OF LAND OR BUILDINGS IN COMMUNITY USE WHICH, IN TERMS OF THEIR LOCATION, PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ACCESSIBILITY, ARE CONSIDERED SUITABLE TO MEET IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY NEEDS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED, UNLESS:

- i) ADEQUATE, APPROPRIATE, ALTERNATIVE PROVISION SUFFICIENT TO ACCOMMODATE THE LOSS IS INCLUDED AS PART OF THE PROPOSAL, OR**
- ii) SUFFICIENT CONVENIENT PROVISION IS ALREADY AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE.**

Provision of New Community Services and Facilities

- 9.12 Planning applications for new community services and facilities, such as medical centres, schools, veterinary practices and places of worship which will meet the needs of local residents or provide for the defence of the realm will be considered sympathetically provided they are within the built-up area of a settlement, including the villages defined in policy GS3. Exceptionally a small scale

community facility may be allowed adjacent to the built up area of a settlement when a clearly identified need cannot be met in any other way or within or adjacent to a group of existing buildings providing for such uses, providing the site is not in the Green Belt. Extensions of an appropriate scale and design or, in appropriate circumstances, a change in the use of an existing building may also be acceptable ways of providing improved community services and facilities for the local community. A change of use may secure the future of a building that would otherwise remain vacant and could become derelict.

- 9.13 In considering any application, the Council will wish to ensure that the proposal will not have an adverse effect on the amenities of nearby residents, the occupiers of surrounding buildings or the local environment by, for example, causing noise, car parking or highway safety problems or by their use during unsociable hours. Proposals will be required to meet the Council's general policies for development as set out in Chapter 4 and will be expected to be located where they are easily accessible by foot, cycle and public transport, with special care being taken to maximise access for all. Proposals for new facilities for sport and recreation will be considered against the policies in the leisure chapter and not policy CF2 below. Proposals for changes of use will also be considered in the context of policies GS5, GS7 and GS8.

POLICY CF2

DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS PROPOSED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROVISION OF NEW SERVICES AND FACILITIES FOR THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING EXTENSIONS TO AND CHANGES IN THE USE OF EXISTING BUILDINGS, WILL BE PERMITTED WHERE THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE MET:

- i) THE PROPOSAL CONFORMS WITH THE GENERAL POLICIES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE PLAN AND IN PARTICULAR MAXIMISES AS FAR AS IS POSSIBLE ACCESS FOR ALL;**
- ii) ANY PROPOSAL FOR A NEW BUILDING IS WITHIN THE BUILT-UP AREA OF A SETTLEMENT OR WITHIN OR ADJACENT TO A GROUP OF EXISTING BUILDINGS PROVIDING FOR SUCH USES AND IS NOT WITHIN THE GREEN BELT OUTSIDE A VILLAGE AREA DEFINED IN POLICY GS3 OR OUTSIDE A MAJOR DEVELOPED SITE DEFINED IN POLICY GS4;**
- iii) ANY EXTENSION WILL NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER OR SETTING OF THE EXISTING BUILDING OR ITS SURROUNDINGS, OR SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER THE CHARACTER AND SCALE OF THE EXISTING ACTIVITY SO AS TO CAUSE HARM TO THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT; AND**

EXCEPTIONALLY, DEVELOPMENT OF A SMALL SCALE COMMUNITY FACILITY ADJACENT TO THE BUILT-UP AREA OF A SETTLEMENT WILL BE PERMITTED:

- a) **WHERE IT MEETS A CLEARLY IDENTIFIED LOCAL NEED THAT CANNOT BE MET IN ANY OTHER WAY; AND**
- b) **IT IS NOT WITHIN THE GREEN BELT OUTSIDE A VILLAGE AREA DEFINED IN POLICY GS3.**

Childcare Provision

- 9.14 In recent years the provision of childcare facilities has become an issue of heightened significance as more women seek employment. This trend has been reflected in an increasing number of planning applications being submitted for day nurseries and kindergartens. The District Council is anxious that the provision of childcare facilities in the Vale should be enhanced, recognising that a network of such facilities can be a considerable benefit to the local economy and to the district's residents. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that such provision, particularly in quiet residential areas, can give rise to problems caused by for example noise, traffic and parking.
- 9.15 Responsibility for enforcing standards and regulating childcare falls to OFSTED and they issue each childminder with a registration certificate indicating the number of children they are allowed to care for, in line with national standards. Government advice in PPG4 indicates that compliance with such ratios would normally mean that the character of the home's use as a single dwelling had not changed and that planning provision would not be required. The relevant ratios can be obtained from OFSTED.
- 9.16 Where proposals for childcare facilities require planning permission, applications will be considered against policy GS3 relating to development in the Green Belt and the general policies for development set out in Chapter 4 (principally policies DC1–DC3, DC5, DC9 and DC10).
- 9.17 New buildings to provide accommodation for childcare facilities will be considered sympathetically by the Council provided they are within the built-up areas of settlements (as defined in policies GS1, GS3, H11 and H12). The Council will be concerned to ensure that the proposals are located in sustainable locations which minimise the need to travel and that they do not have an adverse effect on the amenities of residential areas and can meet normal planning requirements in relation to issues such as parking and highway safety. In this respect a location within an established employment site may have advantages, as well as being convenient for those seeking to make use of the facility. Appropriate proposals on such sites will be encouraged by the Council.
- 9.18 Many proposals for childcare facilities involve the change of use of existing buildings, in particular dwellings. As with proposals for new buildings, the Council would want to ensure that existing residents are not adversely affected by such schemes.

9.19 The Council applies the following general guidelines to help determine applications involving the change of use of an existing building to a childcare facility.

- i) in the case of detached premises set in large grounds, permission may be granted for a childcare facility catering generally for up to a maximum of 24 children;
- ii) in a detached house on an estate or a large semi-detached house (with substantial party walls), the upper limit should be 12 children; and
- iii) in estates, terraces and small semi-detached houses, childcare facilities for more than six children are likely to create a nuisance in terms of noise and access and therefore are unlikely to be permitted.

It may, in some instances, be appropriate to use existing community buildings, where these are under-used in the day time. Such buildings are usually in accessible locations and have space around them to accommodate the needs associated with a childcare use.

Cemetery Provision

9.20 Whilst policy CF2 above provides the general policy context that applies to community services and facilities, the Council has been asked specifically to consider the need for future cemetery provision at Faringdon and Wantage.

9.21 In Faringdon there is concern that the existing cemetery in Coach Lane is approaching capacity and, due to the expansion of the town, that additional burial space will be needed very soon. From the junction of Coach Lane and Church Walk, it is some 200 metres to All Saints Church. On the eastern side of the existing cemetery there is an open field which is bounded on its northern side by Church Walk. As this land is on the edge of the built-up area of the town, has not been previously developed and is designated as an area of protected landscape it is an area where new buildings would be resisted. However, having regard to the need for additional burial space the Council believes an extension of the cemetery onto this adjoining land would be logical.

POLICY CF3

LAND AT CHURCH WALK, AS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, WILL BE RESERVED FOR AN EXTENSION TO THE FARINGDON CEMETERY.

9.22 Wantage Town Council has estimated that an area of approximately 6000 square metres (0.6 hectares) would be needed to accommodate burials in the town over the next 50 year period. The Town Council has commented that it considers any new burial land should avoid the need for significant new infrastructure, should

not be on land that might otherwise be more appropriate for other land uses and should be located so as not to cause objection to adjoining or nearby residents. The existing town cemetery is off Chain Hill. There is open land to the south. Although this land is not covered by a specific landscape constraint policy, it is outside the development boundary of the town and begins to rise steeply towards Chain Hill. For these reasons it is not an area which would be identified for new building. Having regard to the identified need for additional burial space the District Council believes this land would be a logical extension of the existing cemetery.

POLICY CF4

LAND AT CHAIN HILL, AS IDENTIFIED ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, WILL BE RESERVED FOR AN EXTENSION TO THE WANTAGE CEMETERY.

Public Houses

- 9.23 Pubs, with their ancillary facilities such as restaurants, are important elements in the community life of most towns and villages. In some smaller villages, the pub may be the sole surviving retail and social facility, and in suburban areas it can provide a natural focus for community activity.
- 9.24 Set against the growing importance of leisure and tourism in the economy generally, it is perhaps surprising that there is a trend for the closure of public houses. There have been changes within the brewing industry, however, which have had an impact on the pattern of public house distribution: the smaller, remoter pub has come under particular threat, while interest has increased in the larger road house style of operation with restaurants, overnight accommodation and other ancillary facilities attached.
- 9.25 The steady erosion of village services such as shops, post offices and schools has been paralleled by losses of rural public houses. For rural communities and those concerned with rural life, this is a matter of concern.
- 9.26 The Rural White Paper *Our Countryside: the Future* (2000) sets out the Government's vision which seeks to promote 'a living countryside' with thriving rural communities and 'a working countryside' with a prosperous and diverse economy. To assist this vision the Government has set up a 'community service fund' managed by the Countryside Agency, to which businesses, such as village shops, pubs and garages, will be able to apply for grants. There is also a 50% rate relief to pubs and garages which benefit the rural community.
- 9.27 Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development In Rural Areas* states that the Government's objectives for rural areas include the promotion of thriving, inclusive and sustainable rural communities whilst continuing to protect the open countryside for the benefit of all.

- 9.28 In an effort to bring this issue to public notice, the organisation Business in the Community recently carried out a promotion called 'The Pub is the Hub' which emphasised how important public houses are to rural life in particular.
- 9.29 There is clearly considerable support from many quarters for preventing the further loss of rural and other pubs of community importance. The District Council is anxious that pubs in the Vale which can be shown to be central to community life should not be lost unnecessarily and it will wish to consider carefully any proposal which involves the change of use of such a pub before an alternative use is permitted.
- 9.30 The Government's desire to deliver thriving and sustainable communities means that any proposal for the loss of a public house outside the five main towns will be looked at carefully. Consistent with this approach the Council will apply a presumption that the re-use or redevelopment of a public house will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the public house is not an important local community facility, it is not viable for the public house use to continue and, for pubs in rural areas, the building cannot be put to some other community use.
- 9.31 In its consideration of these issues, the Council will look carefully at the role any pub plays in its community and what services it provides; eg. as a traditional place to buy a drink; as a place for quality and good value foods; as a base for activities and teams involved in eg. darts, 'Aunt Sally', pool and dominoes; as a place where local groups meet eg. local sports teams, folk or other music groups and quiz nights; as a place offering other services eg. a rural shop, post office or bank; and as a venue for local events in general.
- 9.32 Regard will also be had to the location of the pub and to how easily it is for local people to go to an alternative facility. Current research suggests that the desirable accessibility for a pub should be a normal actual distance of within 800m (approx. ½ mile) and no more than 1000m (approx. 2/3 mile). This should ensure that the pub is as 'walkable' as possible. (*Sustainable Settlements, University of West of England and The Local Government Management Board (1995) and Shaping Neighbourhoods, Spon Press (2003).*)
- 9.33 Consequently, when assessing a pub's community value the Council will want to consider, in the round, factors such as its location, its distance from other pubs and the role it plays in the community.
- 9.34 Assessing the on-going viability of a pub can involve various matters such as examining financial turnover, consumption of barrels and comprehensive audits of accounting and operational details. It will also involve consideration of the marketing of the pub, whether as a going concern or where trading has actually ceased. Care will be taken to look at how the pub was operated over time, marketed and advertised for sale, whether the sale value was realistic, over what period it was advertised and whether the potential of the business was reflected

in this process. An applicant should provide as much information on all these matters as possible. If necessary, the Council will bring in outside expertise to comment on the information received. It will not be enough for an applicant to say that a pub is not viable if this cannot be proved to be correct.

- 9.35 Applicants and/or developers should be aware that the onus will be on them to clearly make the case for the re-use or redevelopment of a public house.
- 9.36 Where a public house is demonstrably not economically viable it may be difficult for a planning authority to resist its closure or change of use. However, the irreversible loss of an existing public house from a village or other local community could have especially severe implications, particularly if it is the only remaining facility in the area. In such circumstances, it is proposed to articulate the support for services recommended in government guidance through the following policy.

POLICY CF5

OUTSIDE THE FIVE MAIN TOWNS, THE REDEVELOPMENT OR CHANGE OF USE OF PREMISES WHICH ARE USED OR HAVE BEEN USED AS A PUBLIC HOUSE WILL BE PERMITTED UNLESS:

- i) THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT THE PUBLIC HOUSE IS AN IMPORTANT LOCAL COMMUNITY FACILITY, WHEN IT MUST BE DEMONSTRATED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE ECONOMICALLY VIABLE TO CONTINUE WITH THAT USE;**
- ii) IN THE CASE OF PUBLIC HOUSES WITHIN OR IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE VILLAGES LISTED UNDER POLICIES H11 AND H12 THE APPLICANT CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT THERE IS NO REASONABLE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT, RETAIL, SERVICE OR COMMUNITY USE, OR A MIX OF THESE USES, OF BENEFIT TO THE ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL LIFE OF THE VILLAGE MAKING USE OF THE BUILDING.**

- 9.37 Proposals for new pubs or restaurants (or for extensions or alterations to pub or restaurant buildings and sites) can involve building in particularly sensitive locations: for example in the open countryside, on sites immediately adjacent to houses or in some cases in a conservation area. The developments proposed can cause considerable concern in the locality. New facilities outside the built-up areas of existing settlements will be resisted under policy GS2 and new facilities in the Green Belt will be resisted under policy GS3. All new facilities will be considered against the Plan's general policies for development. (Proposals for the addition of bedrooms to public houses to provide visitor accommodation is considered in the tourism chapter of the Local Plan).

Telecommunications

- 9.38 Modern telecommunications and mobile services are hugely popular and make a significant contribution to the national economy. They include all forms of communication by electrical or optical wire and cable and radio signals, whether terrestrial or from satellite. To work effectively they need sufficient infrastructure. This can have a significant impact on the appearance of individual buildings, on towns and on the countryside. They have also given rise to health concerns. The policies in this section deal with the siting of apparatus in relation to both its impact on the visual quality of the environment and its possible health effects.

Masts and Antennae

- 9.39 In Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: *Telecommunications* (PPG8), the Government attaches considerable importance to keeping the number of radio and telecommunications masts and sites to a minimum. The sharing of masts and the erection of antennae on existing buildings and structures such as electricity pylons can help to achieve this. The Council will expect applications for new masts to be accompanied by information to show that these opportunities have first been explored.
- 9.40 There has been widespread public concern about the health effects of radio waves from telecommunications installations. This issue was considered in the Stewart Report, May 2000. The report recommended a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phone technologies until there is more information on any health effects. In accordance with this precautionary approach, applications will be considered against guidelines on limiting exposure to radio waves published by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). In the Government's view 'if a proposed development meets the ICNIRP guidelines it should not be necessary for a local planning authority, in processing a planning application ... to consider further the health aspects.' (PPG8).
- 9.41 In order that the health effects of a proposal can be fully considered, and to avoid delay in its determination, the Council considers that an application ought to be accompanied by the following information:
- i) a certificate of compliance with ICNIRP public exposure guidelines;
 - ii) where apparatus is proposed on or near a school, nursery, playgroup, playground, recreation ground or hospital property, a statement will be requested as to whether or not the beam of greatest intensity will fall on any part of the property in question. (One of the Stewart Report's recommendations was that the beam of greatest intensity should not fall on any part of a school's grounds or buildings);

- iii) details of the location of the apparatus, the height of the antennae, the frequency and modulation characteristics, details of the power output, the radiation pattern showing exposure related to bearing, range and elevation from the antennae (this pattern should reflect the full usage of the system) with the units being expressed as a proportion of the ICNIRP guidelines.
- 9.42 In addition, this Council has adopted a corporate policy in considering telecommunications masts on its own land which is 100 times more stringent than the ICNIRP guidelines.
- 9.43 Applicants should be aware that the Council will scrutinise carefully proposals for the siting of masts or antennae near places or premises visited or used by children, for example schools and childcare facilities. For masts with multiple installations (either existing or proposed), each operator's apparatus should be assessed separately and the results aggregated. This is because exposure to radio waves for multiple operators is generally additive.
- 9.44 In any development, significant and irremediable interference with other electrical equipment can be a material planning consideration. If there is clear evidence that such interference will arise, or will probably arise, from a proposal and there is no practicable remedy, the Council will take this into account when determining the planning application.
- 9.45 Development for telecommunications in the Green Belt will be expected to maintain openness in line with policy GS3. However, it is recognised that, due to the technical and operational characteristics of telecommunications development proposals may be made which do not maintain openness. Such development is inappropriate and will only be permitted if very special circumstances are demonstrated which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. In these circumstances the operator must demonstrate that there are no suitable alternative sites outside the Green Belt which would meet the needs of network coverage or capacity.

POLICY CF6

WHERE PLANNING PERMISSION IS NEEDED FOR DOMESTIC AND COMMERCIAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS APPARATUS, PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED PROVIDED:

- i) **THE APPARATUS WOULD NOT CONFLICT WITH POLICY GS3 TO PROTECT THE GREEN BELT OR CAUSE VISUAL HARM TO THE SURROUNDING AREA OR TO THE BUILDING OR STRUCTURE ON WHICH IT IS TO BE POSITIONED;**
- ii) **IN CASES WHERE THE VISUAL IMPACT OF THE APPARATUS ON THE SITE CHOSEN BY THE OPERATOR FAILS TO SATISFY CLAUSE (i), THE OPERATOR HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE ARE NO ALTERNATIVE SITES WHICH ARE BOTH TECHNICALLY FEASIBLE AND LESS HARMFUL TO VISUAL AMENITY. IN**

CONSIDERING THIS MATTER THERE SHOULD BE NO PRACTICABLE POSSIBILITY FOR SHARING EXISTING FACILITIES OR OF ERECTING ANTENNA ON AN EXISTING BUILDING OR STRUCTURE;

- iii) THE OPERATION OF THE APPARATUS WILL NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE HEALTH OF LOCAL PEOPLE; AND**
- iv) THE OPERATION OF THE APPARATUS WILL NOT CAUSE SIGNIFICANT OR IRREMIEDIABLE INTERFERENCE TO OTHER ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT.**

PARTICULAR ATTENTION WILL BE PAID TO THE PROPOSED POSITION OF THE APPARATUS AND ITS SCALE, DESIGN AND MATERIALS.

Satellite Dishes

- 9.46 There has been significant growth in the range and use of satellite television and broadcasting where television signals are transmitted direct to individual receiving antennae, the more common ones known as satellite dishes.
- 9.47 Where permission is required to erect a dish, it is important to ensure it blends in with its background. The dish should be sited, so far as is practicable, to minimise its impact on amenity and on the external appearance of the building. Choosing an appropriate colour can also help to reduce visual impact. Siting and design concerns will be particularly important if the installation is proposed in an especially sensitive location, such as on a listed building, in a conservation area or within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Applicants are advised to discuss their proposals with the District Council before submitting them formally for consideration.
- 9.48 Helpful guidance on the siting of satellite television antennae can be found in *A Housebuilder's Planning Guide for the Installation of Satellite Television Dishes* available from the District Council.

POLICY CF7

APPLICATIONS FOR SATELLITE DISHES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THEY ARE SITED AND COLOURED SO AS TO MINIMISE THEIR VISUAL IMPACT ON THE STREETSCENE, THE APPEARANCE OR SETTING OF A BUILDING AND ON THE ENVIRONMENT GENERALLY, PARTICULARLY IN CONSERVATION AREAS, THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY, OR THE NORTH VALE CORALLIAN RIDGE. PROPOSALS FOR SATELLITE DISHES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED WHERE THEY WOULD CAUSE HARM TO THE CHARACTER, APPEARANCE OR SETTING OF A LISTED BUILDING OR THE CHARACTER OF THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT.

- 9.49 Policies in the historic environment chapter of the Local Plan which deal with listed buildings and conservation areas should also be referred to where appropriate.

Development for Utility Companies on Operational Land

- 9.50 Many facilities are provided by utility companies such as those responsible for electricity, gas, water supply and sewage disposal. In some circumstances the development they wish to carry out on their operational land will be 'permitted development' and will not require planning permission. In the context of the recent regulations relating to environmental impact assessment (EIA) (Statutory Instrument 1999, no. 293, as amended), where it is the Council's opinion that an EIA is required for development, permitted development rights will be withdrawn and a planning application must be submitted and accompanied by an Environmental Statement.
- 9.51 In situations where utility companies propose developments which do require permission the Council, before granting such permission, will wish to be satisfied that the development concerned is required in that location to enable the utility company to fulfil its statutory obligations. It will also wish to be satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect the local or wider environment, cause traffic problems or have an unacceptable visual impact. These requirements are set out in policy CF8 below.
- 9.52 Utility companies are advised to consult the Council in cases where they believe there is a possibility of an EIA being required, particularly where, under normal circumstances, the development would benefit from permitted development rights.
- 9.53 Where development is located in the Green Belt, reference should also be made to policy GS3.

POLICY CF8

OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED BY UTILITY COMPANIES WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:

- i) IT IS NECESSARY TO MEET THE COMPANY'S STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS; AND**
- ii) IT WILL NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE AMENITIES OF THE LOCAL OR WIDER ENVIRONMENT.**

Proposed Reservoir

- 9.54 The demand for water in the Thames region is rising, due to both an increase in the consumption per person and the increasing number of people living in the area. As a result of a study in the early 1990s, Thames Water identified a site south-west of Abingdon where the company considered it feasible to construct a new reservoir. The study area consisted of land to the north of the London–Bristol railway between the villages of East Hanney, Steventon, Drayton and Marcham.
- 9.55 In its *Water Resources for the Future: A Strategy for the Thames Region* (March 2001) the Environment Agency notes that the increasing demand for water will put pressure on the existing supply across the region with significant implications for the future given the long lead times for major schemes. The Agency has concluded that there should be 'further investigation of the need for, and impacts of, the development of new strategic resources, principally for the Upper Thames ... Options include new reservoir storage, such as the proposed Abingdon scheme ...'. The Agency's summary of regional options for public water supply by 2005 lists 'new reservoir storage' and comments that a scheme 'potentially of a significantly lesser size than currently being considered by the company (Thames Water) may be required'.
- 9.56 Against this background Thames Water is currently reviewing its *Water Resources Plan* which will set out how to maintain the balance of supply and demand over the next 25 years.
- 9.57 The growing demand for water has to be balanced with the needs of the environment but demand management and the introduction of new resource-efficient practices also have a role to play. Only if a proposal for a new reservoir can be shown to represent the best practical environmental option, all alternative options having been considered and shown not to be more sustainable in the longer term, will the Council respond positively to the scheme. It will seek to remove or mitigate the adverse effects of the development on local communities, the local and wider environment and existing infrastructure and will consider carefully any potential contribution which could be made in terms of recreation provision, nature conservation and enhanced biodiversity.

POLICY CF9

ANY PROPOSAL FOR A NEW RESERVOIR WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS:

- i) **MEASURES TO MANAGE DEMAND FOR WATER IN THE THAMES WATER REGION PROVE INCAPABLE OF AVOIDING THE NEED FOR A NEW RESERVOIR; AND**

- ii) THE PROVISION OF A NEW RESERVOIR IS THE ONLY ECONOMICALLY VIABLE, LEAST ENVIRONMENTALLY DAMAGING AND MOST SUSTAINABLE MEANS IN THE LONGER TERM OF MEETING PROVEN NEED FOR INCREASED WATER RESOURCES IN THE WATER COMPANY'S REGION AS A WHOLE; AND
- iii) THE PROPOSED RESERVOIR REPRESENTS THE BEST PRACTICABLE ENVIRONMENTAL OPTION, HAVING REGARD TO ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS; AND
- iv) GEOLOGICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL AND INFRASTRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS DEMONSTRATE THAT THE PROPOSED LOCATION IS UNAVOIDABLE.
- v) THE IMPACTS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RESERVOIR AND ANY SUBSEQUENT RECREATIONAL USE ON EXISTING COMMUNITIES (INCLUDING RESIDENTS AND EXISTING FARM ENTERPRISES) THE LOCAL AND WIDER HIGHWAY NETWORK, THE LANDSCAPE AND NATURE CONSERVATION INTERESTS ARE MINIMISED; AND
- vi) THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS IN TERMS OF THE CREATION OF WILDLIFE HABITATS AND BIODIVERSITY AND THE RESTORATION OR PROVISION OF AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE FOR THE WILTS AND BERKS CANAL ARE MAXIMISED.

Production of Renewable Energy on a Commercial Basis

9.58 Renewable energy is the term used to cover those continuous energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment, for example, energy from the sun, the wind, the ocean, from plants and the fall of water. It also refers to the energy available in waste products and from the earth itself. It is a subject therefore, which is both wide ranging and complex, embracing a variety of activities and developments, many of which have different site requirements and can operate at different scales. Proposals can vary from a single wind turbine supplying the energy requirements of a single house to large municipal incinerators providing power to a conurbation.

9.59 Increasing the UK's reliance on renewable energy as a means of electricity production has become a priority for the current government. It therefore seems certain that interest in renewable energy projects will increase in the years ahead and the Council could be asked to determine planning applications for a whole variety of proposals. Schemes will require careful consideration and it is inevitable that difficult choices will need to be made. Whereas development of renewable energy and increased energy efficiency can bring environmental and economic benefits, in particular by contributing to the reduction in the use of more conventional energy sources such as fossil fuels, renewable energy projects can also have a significant impact on the local environment. The Council will need to weigh these issues carefully, a task which will be made more difficult by the continued advances being made in the technology associated with renewable energy schemes.

- 9.60 National and strategic planning policies and advice provide a context for the Council's local plan policy. The Government has placed a target requirement on electricity providers to produce 10% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010 (The Renewables Obligation, April 2002). A positive, strategic approach to planning for renewable energy is essential to help deliver this target. The Government's national planning policy is set out principally in PPS22: *Renewable Energy*. The Government's commitment to renewable energy is set out in the Energy White Paper (February 2003). The fundamental aim of Government policy is to stimulate the exploitation of renewable energy sources whenever they have prospects of being economically attractive and environmentally acceptable. To help stimulate the exploitation of renewable energy the Renewables Obligation requires electricity supply companies to secure a specified amount of their electricity capacity from renewable sources, such as wind and solar power (but not energy from mass incineration of domestic waste).
- 9.61 PPS22 gives planning authorities guidance on a range of issues that affect the siting of renewable energy projects. The PPS gives further guidance on specific forms of renewable energy, including wind, waste combustion, hydropower, energy crops all types of wood fuel, including wood residue, anaerobic digestion, land fill gas and active solar systems.
- 9.62 The Oxfordshire Structure Plan supports the development of renewable sources of energy subject to proper consideration of their environmental effects. The County Council has been in discussion with the Energy Technology Support Unit (ETSU) which has conducted an assessment of renewable energy. It is likely that the greatest potential renewable energy sources in the county will be municipal waste combustion and short rotation coppice (the latter involves generating electricity by the gasification of wood grown as a crop). Wind energy, land fill gas and straw combustion may have some limited potential. Structure Plan policies cover proposals for the development of renewable sources of energy, the development of wind energy, new power stations and combined heat and power schemes.
- 9.63 In view of the Government's support for renewable energy and acknowledging the benefits of moving away from a dependence on fossil and nuclear fuels, the Council wishes to respond positively, wherever possible, to proposals that encourage the production of energy via renewable resources. Nevertheless, the effect of schemes on the local environment, especially where there are special landscape, nature conservation, archaeological or historic designations, and the impact of proposals on the amenities of local residents will be important factors in the Council's deliberations. An appropriate balance must be sought between the conservation of the Vale's sensitive landscape, the protection of the amenities of its local residents and the development of long-term renewable energy sources.

- 9.64 Chapter 3 of this Local Plan makes it clear that there will be a general presumption against inappropriate development in the Vale's area of the Oxford Green Belt. The Council attaches the utmost importance to the protection of its Green Belt and will seek to keep the undeveloped land within it permanently open and to safeguard its visual amenity against potentially damaging new development. These considerations will be foremost in the Council's mind in the event of a proposal being submitted for a renewable energy scheme on Green Belt land. The Council will also have regard to the purposes of including land in the Green Belt and will seek to ensure that any proposal for a renewable energy scheme does not conflict with these purposes.

POLICY CF10

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ON A COMMERCIAL BASIS WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT THEY AND ANY TRANSMISSION LINES REQUIRED:

- i) WILL NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE OPEN AND RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. IN THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY AND THE NORTH VALE CORALLIAN RIDGE, THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE LANDSCAPE MUST BE CONSERVED;**
- ii) WILL NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS, OR THE ENJOYMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE BY VISITORS, IN TERMS OF NOISE, VISUAL IMPACT, ODOUR, SMOKE, FUMES, ASH, DUST, GRIT, VIBRATION, ELECTRO-MAGNETIC INTERFERENCE OR TRAFFIC GENERATION;**
- iii) DO NOT AFFECT ADVERSELY AREAS AND FEATURES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORIC, ARCHITECTURAL OR NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE (INCLUDING LISTED BUILDINGS, CONSERVATION AREAS, SCHEDULED MONUMENTS AND HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS), NATURE RESERVES, SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST OR ANCIENT WOODLANDS.**