

5. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

- 5.1 This section contains the framework for managing the development elements of the Structure Plan in the most sustainable way. It largely comprises general policy criteria which should be applied along with the other topic or geographically specific policies when considering development proposals or options.
- 5.2 The matters addressed are those which are central to current national and local debates about how to reconcile pressures for development and growth with the increasing awareness about the need to preserve and improve living environments, protect the countryside and reduce traffic. The policies themselves cover development form and the minimisation of its impact upon the environment generally, urban and rural regeneration, the maintenance of Green Belts and the conservation of energy. Closely related are the resource implications of delivering high quality and environmentally acceptable development. The onus which will be placed on developers to satisfy needs for infrastructure and services which arise from their development is therefore made clear at this point in the Plan.
- 5.3 Government guidance in its various forms, the views of other local authorities, agencies, groups and individuals have all been drawn upon when putting together this fundamental part of the policy framework. However, it must be recognised that sustainable development cannot be reached overnight and the Structure Plan can only be one element in the move towards greater sustainability. What land use plans can do, and what this Plan aims to achieve, is to establish in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent patterns of development which are not incompatible with and will indeed pave the way for a more truly sustainable way of living.

Sustainable Forms of Development

D1 Sustainable forms and patterns of new development will be sought which:

- (a) concentrate as much new built development as possible within the fabric of existing urban areas (while protecting or enhancing their distinctive character and environmental quality);**
- (b) consider all possibilities for reuse of land and buildings, including the reclamation of contaminated and derelict land in sustainable development locations before using greenfield land (though use of rural brownfield land is generally unlikely to be a sustainable development option);**
- (c) generally restrict greenfield development to a limited number of strategic nodes in transport corridors where there is or could be accessibility to a choice of modes of transport;**
- (d) create communities where there is a balanced mix of land uses which will reduce the need to travel, the distance travelled and the adverse effects of transportation;**
- (e) minimise the consumption of all resources, particularly those which are non-renewable such as land (especially the best and most versatile agricultural land) and minerals;**

- (f) protect and, wherever possible, enhance natural and cultural assets, including open spaces;**
- (g) ensure that the interests of regeneration in adjoining urban areas are not prejudiced;**
- (h) have regard to the long term implications of development proposals, the implementation of which may run beyond the end of the Plan period;**
- (i) have regard to the location and effects of existing nearby land uses with the potential to generate pollution which could have an unacceptably detrimental effect on the proposed development.**

- 5.4 A substantial amount of new development will be required in the Plan area over the period to 2011. This development must take place in ways which contribute to the principles of sustainable development. It must also be of a quality which improves the environment of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and preserves or enhances local character. Policy D1 provides a mandatory checklist against which development proposals should be measured.
- 5.5 Where new development is necessary, the ultimate aim is to create communities where there is a balanced mix of land uses, where there is a reduced need to travel, and where the impact of the development on natural and cultural assets is minimised. The emphasis will be on the reuse of land within existing urban areas. The development of greenfield sites in locations peripheral or close to urban areas may, however, be necessary where there are no acceptable brownfield alternatives and provided they are accessible to regular public transport and preferably in transport corridors. (Brownfield development should similarly be promoted in rural areas only where it can be demonstrated to be in the interests of sustainable development and where it meets the criteria of Policy D4).
- 5.6 The quality of the living environment should be high with an emphasis placed on reducing pollution in all its forms and allowing new development of a type and scale in keeping with its surroundings. Natural assets which should be particularly valued and protected include river and watercourse corridors, woodlands, hedgerows and urban trees in addition to priority habitats and species identified in the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan. It should be remembered that buildings provide significant habitats for a variety of species including bats and owls, and restoration or conversion proposals should take this into account. Revegetated derelict land can also often be biologically diverse and reclamation proposals should be sensitive to such considerations. Due weight should also be given to the need to maintain or improve the character of the countryside within the framework established by Policies NC1 and NC2 and accompanying supplementary guidance.
- 5.7 It is also most important to recognise that decisions about development taken now will affect the pattern of development well into the next century. Structure and local plan policies must have regard to this fact when proposing larger development schemes which may not reach maturity in terms of providing more sustainable and rounded communities until some time after the end of the period of the Plan. Wherever possible, some indication should be provided as to the ultimate scale and form development proposals will take and, where appropriate, what implications there may be for the environment, and, in particular, for Green Belt boundaries and for the countryside.

The Design and Environmental Quality of Development

- D2 Development should generally conserve and, where possible, improve the quality of life and the environment and should:**
- (a) be informed by, or sympathetic to, the character and qualities of its surroundings, in its location, scale and design;**
 - (b) be designed to relate to its surrounding context while not excluding innovative and creative designs;**
 - (c) minimise pollution of land, water and air, waste generation, nuisance from noise, and pollution by artificial sources of light;**
 - (d) avoid hazards to health and safety;**
 - (e) include pollution prevention measures to prevent contamination of controlled waters, be connected to the foul sewerage system, whenever feasible, and not proceed ahead of the ability of water supply, sewerage and sewage treatment systems to effectively service the proposed development;**
 - (f) not take place in floodplains unless acceptable mitigating measures are provided which protect the development itself without increasing flood risk elsewhere;**
 - (g) incorporate, wherever possible, sustainable surface water drainage techniques;**
 - (h) avoid the culverting of watercourses and, wherever possible, incorporate existing open watercourses and their associated corridors as features of the development.**

5.8 New built development provides an opportunity to complement or reinforce the existing grain of different areas, streets, squares and spaces (design of urban and rural settlements relates to the relationship between buildings, spaces, activities and patterns of movement). Supplementary design guidance should be prepared where appropriate by local planning authorities to identify the essential characteristics of various sites, areas and localities and suggest ways in which new development might respond to opportunities in these areas.

5.9 A high and creative quality of architecture and design can considerably enhance the image and character of an area. This can benefit the quality of life of people who live and work in the Plan area, and convey a message about the dynamism, distinctiveness and self-confidence of the locality, making it attractive to inward investors. Much recent development has been mundane in design and layout, lacking any sense of place. The adverse impact that this has had on the area's image needs redressing. Innovation and creativity will be encouraged in local planning policy, guidance and advice. High quality design can be achieved within a reasonable budget, and indeed can be cheaper in some instances. Poor design is usually a result not of budget but of inadequate attention or priority being given to design matters at all stages in the development process.

- 5.10 Policy D2(b) should be interpreted as meaning distinctive, site-specific design solutions and the avoidance of imposed standard design solutions which ignore their context. It should not be interpreted to imply that the style and features of older buildings should be copied. Continuity requires that the continuing evolution of architectural style be allowed. Local design policies should generally discourage the slavish copying of the styles and features of older buildings, and allow the evolution of styles which respect and draw from past principles. It will generally be desirable, especially in localities of homogeneous character, to respect the established palette of building materials.
- 5.11 Policy D2 is also designed to ensure that the adverse environmental impact of development is minimised and that local plans include policies to ensure this. In particular:
- adverse impacts of effluent discharges should be as far as possible eradicated, including the minimisation of small package sewage treatment plants and septic tanks in rural areas, where local authorities should work with developers and providers to extend rural sewerage systems where there is a need;
 - developers must be encouraged to incorporate measures which reduce surface water run-off;
 - watercourses should be protected and culverts discouraged;
 - water resource difficulties should be addressed as early as possible in the planning of new development;
 - the siting of industrial development should be such that air pollution or other harm is minimised.

Urban Regeneration

D3 The regeneration of urban areas is a fundamental requirement of a sustainable strategy, to be achieved by supporting initiatives which will enhance the image, create vitality and improve safety, comfort and environmental quality of urban areas. Local authorities will continue to bring forward, on their own behalf or in partnership with other agencies, schemes which:

- (a) concentrate investment on an area basis, thereby assisting access to employment, social and other facilities;**
- (b) enhance the image, attractiveness and accessibility of town centres, boost vitality and encourage new investment;**
- (c) reclaim and reuse derelict, contaminated, degraded or underused land and buildings for new employment, housing, commercial, retail, leisure and amenity uses, in preference to taking greenfield land;**
- (d) improve the availability, quality and diversity of the housing stock (including affordable housing), particularly in areas within or close to town centres;**
- (e) create, retain, protect, improve and extend areas of wildlife value, open spaces and access to watercourses;**

(f) comply with environmental policies in this Plan.

In promoting or considering major initiatives, regard must be had to ensuring that investment is targeted on areas of established need, that the views of local people are taken into account and that development proposals within the Plan area are not of a type which might prejudice regeneration in adjoining urban areas.

- 5.12 Urban regeneration is central to much of the strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Its achievement is dependent not upon one policy but by the application of a wide spectrum of policies in the Structure Plan and local plans and also by other directly related programme initiatives for particular areas. There is a need for an holistic approach to make towns more attractive places to be in, with increased economic opportunities. Improving the quality and diversity of the housing stock, providing improved public transport and creating attractive public areas are all integral to this basic aim.
- 5.13 In terms of sustainability, the re-emergence of towns as desirable places to live and work will help reduce pressure for development in peripheral and countryside areas, which in turn, will cut down distances travelled and vehicular pollution. The reuse of urban land will help preserve attractive and productive countryside areas, while the reuse of buildings will often reduce the consumption of aggregates and other primary materials for construction. Subject to health and safety considerations, contaminated land can be recycled by means of reclamation associated with new development.
- 5.14 There is already widespread evidence of urban regeneration in practice throughout the Plan area. In particular, within the North Staffordshire conurbation, the largest urban area, there are examples of major redevelopment or reuse of degraded or redundant land and buildings for new uses. The creation of green areas within or close to the urban area has been a complementary feature of these continuing initiatives.
- 5.15 Town centres are covered separately in the Plan but their further improvement is vital to the regeneration process generally. Town centres form the cores of urban areas, and any regeneration initiative can only be successful if the town centre is healthy. Attractive, clean and safe centres have a critical role in attracting investment and creating a showcase for urban living.
- 5.16 It is also important that development within the Plan area is compatible with the interests of regeneration in nearby urban areas. This is particularly relevant in southern Staffordshire near the urban concentrations of Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley.

Managing Change in Rural Areas

D4 The essential character and economic and social fabric of rural areas should be maintained and improved by:

- (a) encouraging appropriate development which assists in diversifying the local economy and underpins or improves services and community facilities;**
- (b) seeking the provision of affordable housing where there is a local need;**
- (c) limiting development where it is not matched by supporting infrastructure and facilities, or where there is little prospect of a more balanced community evolving;**

- (d) ensuring that development does not have undesirable traffic impacts and is not of a scale or type which would adversely impact on the rural setting;**
- (e) generally seeking to protect open countryside for its own sake.**

- 5.17 Continuing population growth in rural areas has been accompanied by decline in local jobs and facilities, which has led to greater reliance on car journeys to towns. In the interests of sustainable development, a fundamental aim is to move towards more balanced rural communities where jobs are provided as well as houses. In rural areas, previously developed ('brownfield') land will often be in locations where traffic-generating development would not be sustainable, or might otherwise conflict with the interests of rural communities or the countryside. In such cases, the fact of the site being previously developed should not be given greater weight than the provisions of Policy D4. 'Appropriate' development can be defined as that which will tend to benefit economic activity and maintain or enhance the environment. In particular, it should not generate commuting from wider distances. It may, however, include mineral and waste development which otherwise meets the criteria of the Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan and/or Waste Local Plan.
- 5.18 It is vital that change in rural areas should be recognised and managed positively, having particular regard to Government advice contained in PPG7 and "Planning for Rural Diversification: A Good Practice Guide". It should also be complementary to the policy of promoting urban regeneration. Small businesses and services should be encouraged to set up or expand to provide more local employment, while affordable housing should be allowed in appropriate locations to help arrest the drift of local people on lower incomes away from rural communities. New building should, however, be such as to reflect the individuality of an area and contribute towards a sense of local identity.
- 5.19 On the other hand, there are circumstances where development in settlements will not be beneficial; for example, residential development where there is no prospect of complementary services or employment, or non-residential uses which cannot be sustained by the local population. Such development is likely to be unsustainable by virtue of generating more car journeys, and should not be permitted.
- 5.20 Development in open countryside (which includes wooded and forested areas) should be strictly controlled. As well as protecting the countryside from unnecessary visual incursion, sporadic development away from settlements should be reduced in the interests of sustainability, with houses, jobs and other facilities, including public transport, related more closely to each other. (There may be circumstances where development is appropriate and policies elsewhere in this Plan refer to such. These should be regarded as exceptional and should be consistent with the overall aims of rural regeneration).

Green Belts

D5A Local plans will maintain the general form and purposes of adopted Green Belts. Green Belt boundaries will be redefined only in exceptional circumstances, having regard to:

- (a) the impact of developments on the aim, purposes, and objectives of Green Belts as they apply to those locations;**

- (b) the need to meet specified development requirements of the Plan as referred to in Policies H1 and E4;**
 - (c) the achievement of sustainable development objectives, e.g. to reduce the need to travel;**
 - (d) the longer term development requirements beyond the timescale of the Plan, through inclusion of safeguarded land, if appropriate, where redefinition is proposed;**
- but only after full consideration has been given to any alternative locations or means of provision, including land previously safeguarded in current local plans, that could accommodate the proposed development outside the Green Belt in a sustainable manner.**

5.21 There are three areas of Green Belt in Staffordshire:

- (i) around the North Staffordshire Conurbation;
- (ii) to the north and west of the West Midlands Conurbation; and
- (iii) the small area to the east of Burton upon Trent.

They are incorporated and defined in detail in the relevant adopted local plans. Their purpose is to check urban sprawl, safeguard the surrounding countryside, prevent neighbouring settlements from merging, preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, and assist urban regeneration.

5.22 There are no new Green Belts, or areas of Green Belt, proposed within the Plan area. This accords with the conclusions in Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) that there is no case for a fundamental review of the Green Belts within the region as a whole.

5.23 Planning Policy Guidance (PPG2) and Regional Planning Guidance (RPG11) both advise that Green Belt boundaries should be altered only exceptionally. RPG11 is clear "that development should be accommodated as far as possible within the metropolitan area (of the West Midlands) and North Staffordshire Conurbation; next, within freestanding towns beyond the Green Belt or in settlements excluded from the Green Belt; and only in exceptional circumstances should changes to Green Belt boundaries be considered". In cases where a review of boundaries is necessary, RPG11 requires that proposals be considered against criteria set out in structure plans. The criteria in this plan which should be given particular consideration include those set out in the other policies in this chapter, and Policy NC2 with its supporting supplementary planning guidance.

5.24 Policy D5A sets out the criteria to be applied within the Plan area when appraising the need to redefine Green Belt boundaries. As well as providing the development land necessary to meet the requirements set out in this Plan, the policy makes specific the need for boundary reviews to be related to a timescale longer than that adopted for other aspects of the Plan. In this way, Green Belt boundaries will be provided with a greater degree of permanence. This may require safeguarding land between the urban area and the Green Belt in order to meet longer term development needs.

5.25 General locations where substantial incursions into Green Belt land may be required are identified in Structure Plan Policies E4 and H1, to be defined and taken forward in local plans.

Development in the Green Belt

D5B Inappropriate development within Green Belts will not be permitted, except in very special circumstances.

Construction of new buildings may be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- (a) limited infilling in existing villages, especially for affordable housing or development, meeting Policy D4(a);**
- (b) agriculture and forestry;**
- (c) essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, cemeteries and other uses compatible with the openness of the Green Belt;**
- (d) extensions to existing dwellings which do not result in additions disproportionate to their original size;**
- (e) limited infilling or redevelopment of major existing developed sites where identified in local plans.**

Reuse of buildings within the Green Belt may be appropriate provided that the new use does not have a materially greater impact on the openness or quality of the Green Belt and that any conversion work does not disproportionately increase the size of buildings and is in keeping with the surroundings.

All development within the Green Belt should maintain the visual amenities of the Green Belt and will be subject to other relevant policies.

5.26 Local plan policies and planning decisions concerning the Green Belt should regard the above criteria as subject to amplification by the more detailed guidance provided in PPG2.

Conserving Agricultural Land

D6 The best and most versatile agricultural land will be protected from any form of development, unless:

- (a) there is a strong case of overriding need for development on that site;**
- (b) opportunities have been assessed for accommodating development needs on previously developed sites, land within the boundaries of existing developed areas, and on poorer quality farmland;**
- (c) there is no other site suitable (or which could be made suitable) for the particular purpose, and insufficient lower grade land which does not have an environmental value recognised by statutory designation;**

(d) the development fully accords with other Structure Plan policies.

Where development of such land is permitted, it should, as far as possible, use the lowest grade of land suitable for the development.

- 5.27 Staffordshire is a very diverse farming area with the main enterprises being beef, sheep and dairying, widely integrated with arable cropping and with concentrated areas of market gardening and vegetable growing close to the main urban areas. The southern area, in particular, also experiences the pressures of demand for non-agricultural uses such as development for housing and industry as well as access to the countryside.
- 5.28 Agricultural land is graded according to the degree to which its physical and chemical characteristics impose long term limitations on agricultural use. The grades range from 1 (the most versatile) to 5 (the least versatile). Grades 1 and 2 cover about 9% of the Plan area and have no, or only minor, limitations to their agricultural use. The majority of the Plan area, 57%, is classified as Grade 3 (sub-categorised 3a and 3b in local surveys), with 15% being Grades 4 and 5, the lowest agricultural category, best suited for grass crops and rough grazing. The remainder of the land is in urban (11%) and non-agricultural uses (8%), such as golf courses, allotments, public open spaces, etc.
- 5.29 The provisions of PPG7 - The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development - require that "within the principles of sustainable development, the best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected as a national resource for future generations. This is defined as land in Grades 1, 2 and 3a". Policy D6 seeks to protect those areas of the greatest agricultural production which should only be used where there is an extremely strong case for development which overrides the need to protect such land. In addition, full account must be taken of all other policies in the Structure Plan. In particular, there should be no other site suitable for the development or which could be made suitable for the particular purpose. Given the scale of new development requirements and the locational advice given in Regional Planning Guidance, it would appear that some inroads into high quality agricultural land will be inevitable. Where this is necessary, development should first be directed towards land of the lowest grade. However, where a plot has become physically incapable of incorporation into an agricultural holding capable of being farmed viably, this can be taken into account as a factor material to assessing whether it can be released for development.
- 5.30 Lower grade land is however still recognised as a resource worth protecting. Development of Grade 1, 2 or 3a land may be regarded as preferable to the loss of lower grade land with a statutory landscape, wildlife, historic or archaeological designation, unless there are exceptional agricultural considerations to be taken into account. Where lower grade land is without such protection, it remains subject to the policies in this Plan covering countryside preservation and the protection of the rural economy, and should not be lost unless there is an established need for the development proposed.
- 5.31 Policy D6 relates to all development, even that such as recreation, which maintains the open nature of the countryside, be it on a small scale or the more extensive uses such as golf courses, because once agricultural land is developed, even for "soft" uses, its return to best quality agricultural use is seldom practical. However, mineral development can only take place where the mineral exists. Mineral and some waste developments are temporary uses of land which can potentially be restored to high grade agricultural land. Where minerals and waste proposals accord with national guidance and the Minerals Local Plan, it can be assumed that they accord with Policy D6.

Conserving Energy and Water

D7 In assessing development proposals, measures which help to conserve natural resources will generally be supported. These include:

- (a) more efficient use of energy - development proposals should, wherever appropriate, incorporate measures which obtain a more efficient use of resources. These include higher levels of insulation; effective landscaping shelter; combined heat and power systems; and the location and orientation of sites and buildings;**
- (b) greater use of recycled materials;**
- (c) use of renewable energy resources for the development of renewable energy generating installations, such as wind turbines, will be considered on their merits, having regard to any potential adverse impacts on local people and the local environment (the same will apply to proposals for the exploitation of naturally occurring or by-product gases). Developments should also be encouraged to incorporate photovoltaics or other renewable energy generators, wherever appropriate;**
- (d) more efficient use of water – new development should incorporate the use of rainwater collection systems and the recycling of grey water, wherever possible.**

Development will not be permitted in locations where adequate water resources do not exist, or where the provision of water to serve the development would cause detriment to the natural environment.

- 5.32 The depletion in non-renewable energy sources is a major environmental issue. In addition to policies promoting a development pattern which helps cut down on fuel consumption by reducing the need to travel, there is a need to encourage the use of renewable energy sources, along with those produced as a by-product of activities such as landfill and the adoption of more energy efficient development measures. Policy D7 is intended as a general enabling policy which should be elaborated upon and applied to specific development proposals in local plans and design briefs.
- 5.33 Among renewable energy sources, wind energy is specifically referred to in an Annex to PPG22 and is given particular attention because of the possible suitability of upland or other topographically exposed areas in the Plan area. Wind turbines generate mechanical power which can be used for electricity generation. Harnessing energy from the wind has clear advantages in that it is a clean, renewable source. However, the turbines can have detrimental effects, visual impact and noise being the greatest concerns. Small clusters or large groups of turbines, known as wind farms, are usually necessary if the commercial production of electricity for supply to the grid system is to be viable. A medium-sized wind farm might consist of 10-25 turbines. Commercial scale wind energy schemes will usually need to be located in areas with relatively high annual mean wind speeds. These are normally open, exposed areas and may therefore be viable in the upland areas of North Staffordshire. Although a wind farm would cover a considerable area, the land actually used by the turbines is small and the remainder can continue to be used for agriculture or public access.

- 5.34 Other sources of energy which may be significant locally include wood (the Forest of Mercia is producing a local wood energy plan) and other biomass crops. Development which supports or makes use of these resources will be encouraged, subject to the other policies of this Plan.
- 5.35 As the demand for water continues to increase, further development can place additional pressures on existing resources. In order to manage water resources on a sustainable basis, local authorities will strongly encourage the use and adoption of appropriate and innovative measures to use and dispose of water in a more environmentally responsible manner. In the operation of their development control and building control functions, local authorities will encourage the use of water efficient devices, such as dual flush toilets, spray and pressure controlled taps, and waterless urinals. The reuse of grey water will also be encouraged. New developments should incorporate sustainable surface water drainage techniques to reduce surface water run-off. Such techniques include the use of swales, soakaways, porous pavements, water butts and rainwater harvesting of existing surfaces. However, the use of sustainable surface water techniques may not be appropriate where development is proposed on contaminated land as contaminated material may be remobilised leading to the pollution of controlled waters. Advice on the appropriateness of various forms of sustainable surface water drainage should be obtained from the Environment Agency.

Providing Infrastructure Services, Facilities and/or Mitigating Measures Associated with Development

- D8 Where appropriate, development schemes should be accompanied by the provision of necessary on- and off-site infrastructure, community services, and/or mitigating measures. Local authorities should include in their local plans policies on planning obligations with the aim of securing benefits where these are necessary, relevant to planning, directly related in scale and kind to the proposed development and reasonable in all other respects. The provisions to be negotiated to make the impact of development acceptable may include:**
- (a) pedestrian routes, cycleways, public transport facilities and services, highway infrastructure and appropriate parking;**
 - (b) utility services, including surface water and foul drainage;**
 - (c) educational and community facilities, open space and other recreational facilities;**
 - (d) affordable housing;**
 - (e) high quality landscaping and/or woodland planting;**
 - (f) where damage to protected habitats or those frequented by protected species is unavoidable, the replacement of significant natural habitats or introduction of other appropriate mitigation measures.**

- 5.36 Policy D8 makes clear the requirement for local plans to include policies ensuring that where developments impose a burden on the community in terms of any of the matters referred to, developers will be expected to make provision for that burden to be met. This requirement is integral to the achievement of a sustainable development strategy. Developers should be aware of the general nature and scale of infrastructure, services and directly related facilities which may be required as a result of the development proposed, particularly in respect of major development schemes. Local authorities should maintain consultation with relevant agencies to ensure that community costs of major developments are identified at an early stage. In this connection, regard should be given to the potential for partnerships between the agencies involved in facilitating the realisation of major projects, and/or package initiatives which involve bringing together funding from different sources.
- 5.37 Policies concerning planning obligations should be framed within the requirements of Circular 1/97, in particular the stipulation that they must be relevant to planning, directly related to the proposed development and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development.