

# POLICIES FOR RURAL AREAS

## **RURAL AREAS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- 15.1 The rural areas in this district are as important to the quality of life of its residents as the urban areas. 60% of the land in Welwyn Hatfield is rural, providing support for both economic and community life and sustaining many of the district's identified wildlife habitats. The rural area also provides an important informal source of recreation for all the district's residents.
- 15.2 The Rural White Paper published in November 2000 gives a comprehensive view of the Government's policy agenda for the rural areas. The overall vision includes the following aims:
- improving rural services to tackle rural deprivation and exclusion;
  - making better use of the planning system to provide more affordable homes in rural settlements;
  - reduce reliance on the car and the overall need to travel, with improvements in public transport and other modes of travel;
  - reform of the Common Agricultural programme to allow farmers to adapt to a competitive world market while following practises which conserve and enhance the landscape and wildlife;
  - encouraging farm diversification;
  - conserving and enhancing the countryside, including protecting diversity and character;
  - restoring and maintaining biodiversity;
  - increasing access for everyone to enjoy the countryside.

The policies and objectives in this chapter reflect the overall vision of the White Paper.

- 15.3 All of the district's rural areas are designated as Green Belt. Whilst this has been very helpful in restricting the spread of urban areas it also places restraints on development in rural areas. The changing nature of agriculture and the world economy means that alternative ways of making a living are needed to retain a viable and sustainable rural economy.

### **STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES**

- 15.4 The objectives of the Plan for the district's rural areas are:
- a) to preserve the openness and distinctiveness of place of rural areas by maintaining the Green Belt;
  - b) to safeguard the distinctiveness of the district's variety of landscapes;
  - c) to protect wildlife, trees and hedgerows and encourage biodiversity;
  - d) to encourage a thriving rural village life and retain a social mix of people, by enabling villages to offer employment, shops and services, community facilities and a mix of housing, including affordable homes;

- e) to encourage good quality design which reflects the character of rural areas;
- f) to maintain a sustainable rural economy, protecting the best quality land for agriculture, whilst encouraging diversification which is appropriate;
- g) to improve rural passenger transport services, in order to make rural areas more accessible and enable a reduction in car traffic and congestion;
- h) to promote leisure uses which are appropriate to the countryside;
- i) to restrict development which introduces noise and visual intrusion into the rural areas.

## **POLICIES**

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

15.5 The whole of the district's rural area lies within the Green Belt. Government guidance in PPG2 and Policy 5 in the Structure Plan confirm the general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt except in very special circumstances. It will be for the applicant to justify why permission should be granted. However there are some forms of development which are acceptable in the Green Belt and these are dealt with in the following policies.

#### **Policy RA1 - Development in the Green Belt**

**Within the Green Belt, as defined on the Proposals Map, except for development referred to in Policies RA2, RA3, RA4, RA5, RA6, RA7, RA8, RA9 and RA16 or in very special circumstances, permission will only be given for development for the following purposes:**

- (i) Agriculture, forestry or mineral extraction;**
- (ii) Small scale essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation or for cemeteries and for other uses of the land which preserve the openness of the green belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;**
- (iii) The re-use of buildings in accordance with policy RA17.**

### **Development Within Settlements in the Green Belt**

15.6 Settlements within the Green Belt are subject to general presumption against inappropriate development. Paragraph 4.13 defines two categories of Green Belt settlements. The first of these categories of settlement are Essendon, Northaw, Newgate Street and Lemsford which have a number of facilities with a degree of self sufficiency. The Council considers these settlements have local needs that may justify exceptional development. In accordance with Policies 5 and 6 of the Structure Plan the following policy will apply in these settlements.

#### **Policy RA2 - Development in Settlements within the Green Belt**

**Apart from the exceptions in Policy RA1, within the Green Belt settlements of Essendon, Newgate Street, Northaw, and Lemsford development will only be permitted to accommodate the specific needs of the settlement and the surrounding local rural area for housing, employment, local facilities, services and leisure.**

### **Extensions to Dwellings in the Green Belt**

- 15.7 The Council is concerned about the impact created by extensions to existing dwellings on the openness of the Green Belt.
- 15.8 The extension of a dwelling may be an appropriate development in the Green Belt provided that it would not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original dwelling. The impact of the development on the character of the area, which may vary between different parts of the Green Belt, will also be a significant factor. As a general principle no extension will be approved that would either by itself or taken together with outstanding permissions and previous extensions to the property, make the property more prominent or visually obtrusive.
- 15.9 This policy will also cover those outbuildings of a size and scale that require planning permission (e.g. stables, kennels, garages etc.), because the curtilages of dwellings have an important role in maintaining the openness of the Green Belt.

### **Policy RA3 – Extensions to Dwellings in the Green Belt**

**Permission for extensions to existing dwellings within the Green Belt will be allowed only where all the following criteria are met:**

- (i) The proposal would not individually or when considered with existing or approved extensions to the original dwelling, result in a disproportionate increase in the size of the dwelling;**
- (ii) It would not have an adverse visual impact (in terms of its prominence, size, bulk and design) on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside.**

**This policy also applies to those outbuildings for which planning permission is required.**

### **Replacement of Dwellings in the Green Belt**

- 15.10 The overriding presumption is against inappropriate development within the Green Belt. There are however certain circumstances where the Council considers that it is acceptable to allow the replacement of an existing dwelling. For example, the dwelling may be structurally unsound or incapable of habitation.
- 15.11 In order to safeguard the Green Belt, any replacement dwelling should have no greater impact on the surrounding area than the original. The attractiveness of the rural landscape and local distinctiveness of the area can be harmed by inappropriate urban or suburban design. Therefore, any replacement dwelling should reflect its rural setting in terms of scale, design, materials and location.

- 15.12 Where the original dwelling has already been extended permitted development rights will normally be removed and any subsequent proposals for extensions to the replacement dwelling will be considered against Policy RA3.

#### **Policy RA4 - Replacement of Dwellings in the Green Belt**

**Permission for replacement dwellings within the Green Belt will not be granted unless all of the following criteria are met:**

- (i) The replacement dwelling would not materially exceed the size of the original dwelling in terms of its floorspace, height and volume (existing outbuildings (including detached garages) will not contribute to the calculation of the size of the replacement dwelling except in very exceptional circumstances);**
- (ii) The proposed dwelling would have no greater visual impact in terms of prominence, bulk and design on the character, appearance and pattern of development of the surrounding countryside;**
- (iii) The proposed dwelling is designed to reflect the character and distinctiveness of its rural setting and to accord with the design policies elsewhere in the plan and the supplementary design guidance.**

**Permitted development rights may be removed from the replacement dwelling where its volume is similar to that of the original dwelling and the original dwelling has already been extended.**

#### **Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt**

- 15.13 PPG2 defines major developed sites in the Green Belt, whose buildings and uses predate the Green Belt designation and which require special policies to limit their future development. There are five such major developed sites within the district, all of which are large research or educational establishments. They are:

The Frythe, Welwyn;

New Barnfield Resources Centre, Hatfield;

Queenswood School, Brookmans Park;

The Royal Veterinary College, North Mymms;

Monks Walk and Tewin Water School, Welwyn Garden City.

The boundaries of these sites are shown on Inset Maps 4 to 8. The Royal Veterinary College is also dealt with under policy RA7 because of the special circumstances relating to its development.

- 15.14 Where the existing uses on these sites are successful there is pressure to expand, alter or intensify development. If, at some future point, the facilities on any of these sites are no longer required there will be pressure for redevelopment. All such sites remain subject to restrictive Green Belt development control policies. However, the Council recognises that limited infilling may be acceptable at the sites, which are in continuing use, in order

to retain jobs, but without prejudicing the Green Belt further. Alternatively the complete or partial redevelopment of major developed sites may offer opportunities to improve the environment of the area, without adding to their impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

- 15.15 However, due to the scale of the Major Developed Sites, it is important that any infilling or redevelopment does not occur in an unplanned, incremental way over time, which, taken cumulatively, could have a harmful effect on the Green Belt. Therefore, the Council requires any development to be dealt with comprehensively and brought forward in the context of a master planning brief for each site. The briefs should cover the essential details of planning policy, a Green Travel Plan (if required in accordance with Policy M3) and car parking management scheme, the operational requirements for the site, the principles to guide development, the proposed future layout of the site, any phasing of development, future planning controls and detailed landscaping proposals reflecting landscape character and dealing with rights of way improvement. The briefs will serve as supplementary planning guidance for development control purposes. Therefore, they must be the subject of public consultation, approved by the Council and kept up to date.

**Policy RA5 - Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Limited Infilling)**

**Limited infilling within the Major Developed Sites shown on Inset Maps 4 to 8 will be permitted subject to the following criteria:**

- (ii) The proposal will have no greater impact on the purposes of including land within the Green Belt than the existing development;**
- (iii) The proposal should not exceed the height of the existing buildings;**
- (iv) The proposal should not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site;**
- (v) The proposal should be brought forward in the context of a master planning brief for the site as defined in paragraph 15.15;**
- (vi) Any new development must be acceptable in terms of its impact on the highway network, including highway safety.**

**Policy RA6 - Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt (Redevelopment)**

**Complete or partial redevelopment will be permitted within the boundaries of the Major Developed Sites, as shown on Inset Maps 4 to 8, subject to the following criteria:**

- (i) Proposals should have no greater impact than the existing development on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of land including land within it, and wherever possible should have less impact;**
- (ii) Proposals should make a positive contribution to achieving the objectives for use of land in the Green Belt set out in paragraph 4.7;**

- (iii) **Proposals should not occupy a greater footprint of the site than the existing buildings, excluding temporary buildings, open spaces with direct external access and areas of hardstanding, unless this would achieve a height reduction to the benefit of visual amenity;**
- (iv) **Buildings should not exceed the height of the existing buildings;**
- (v) **The proposal should be brought forward in the context of a master planning brief for the site as defined in paragraph 15.15;**
- (vi) **The preparation of a Green Travel Plan when required under Policy M3, to include measures to control vehicle movement and increase travel to and from the site by alternative modes of transport; and**
- (vii) **Any new development must be acceptable in terms of its impact on the highway network, including highway safety.**

### **The Royal Veterinary College**

- 15.16 A Major Developed Site has been defined at the Hawkshead Campus of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) in recognition of the scale of development which currently exists on the site. It is recognised that the RVC is an important higher education institution. It is one of only six veterinary colleges in the country and has an international reputation as a centre of excellence for education. There is an increasing demand for vets in this country, which is reflected in the growing student numbers of the RVC. In addition, as a result of the increasingly sophisticated clinical needs of the profession, together with the changing responsibilities of the profession in terms of food safety, hygiene and animal diseases, there is a need to provide more sophisticated and comprehensive teaching, research and related facilities for the College.
- 15.17 Whilst the RVC is located within the Green Belt, where new development would usually be considered inappropriate, it is recognised that the RVC does have a claim to having exceptional circumstances which will be taken into consideration when assessing development proposals. The present campus was established many years ago and is now the only location for the College's essential rural operations. As a veterinary college, it is necessary that it is situated in a location with immediate access to farmland and suitable accommodation for all types of animals. In addition, as a higher education institution, the provisions of Annex C of PPG 2 should be taken into consideration; as the majority of the RVC's landholdings are within the Green Belt, and there is no reasonable alternative site outside the Green Belt, some reflection of this situation must be made in considering proposals for new development.
- 15.18 The Council will therefore consider carefully any proposals for further development by the RVC, especially in terms of their impact on the appearance and amenity of the Green Belt and the traffic and travel implications of development. Wherever possible, new development should be within the currently defined Major Developed Site boundary. Proposals for development outside this boundary will need to demonstrate that they meet the test for very special circumstances as set out in PPG2. The Council would

expect new development to contribute to the enhancement of the visual amenity of the Green Belt.

- 15.19 However, due to the scale of the site, it is important that any development does not occur in an unplanned, incremental way over time, which, taken cumulatively, could have a harmful effect on the Green Belt. Therefore, the Council requires any development proposals to be dealt with comprehensively and brought forward in the context of a master planning brief for the site. The brief should cover the essential details of planning policy, a Green Travel Plan, when required under Policy M3 and car parking management scheme, the operational requirements for the site, the principles to guide development, the proposed future layout of the site, any phasing of development, future planning controls, a landscaping framework reflecting landscape character and any rights of way improvements. The brief will serve as planning guidance for development control purposes. Therefore, it must be the subject of public consultation, approved by the Council and kept up to date.

### **Policy RA7 - Royal Veterinary College**

**Proposals for new development at the Royal Veterinary College's Hawkshead Lane campus will be permitted if they fulfill the criteria set out in Policies RA5 and RA6. Any new development must be proposed in the context of a master planning brief for the site as defined in paragraph 15.19. Wherever possible new development should take place within the Major Developed Site boundary. Proposals for new development outside the Major Developed Site boundary must meet the test of very special circumstances set out in PPG2.**

### **Brookmans Park Transmitting Station**

- 15.20 The Brookmans Park Transmitting Station lies within the Green Belt. It is recognised however, that because of the advantages of concentrating telecommunications development at the existing site where technical infrastructure is already in situ, very special circumstances may exist which justify further telecommunications development at this site.
- 15.21 In view of the station's location within the Green Belt, the Council has sought to strictly control such development and to see appropriate landscaping introduced to screen the technical installations from view. In 1995, the Council therefore adopted, in conjunction with the BBC, a master plan covering the future expansion of telecommunications development at the site. This master plan also included a landscaping scheme to screen the site. This was the subject of public consultation and has been adopted as supplementary planning guidance. It now forms the basis for determining planning applications for further telecommunications development at the Brookmans Park Transmitting Station, supplemented by Policy R21.
- 15.22 In recent years there has been an increased demand for telecommunications development on the site, in terms of the number of operators wanting to use the site, the scale of overall development and the size of the individual component parts. The supplementary planning guidance for the site, in the form of the master plan, must be accorded due weight in determining

planning applications, but the guidance needs to be updated in the light of recent development. Given that the site is located in the Green Belt it is also necessary to achieve a balance between the use of the site for telecommunications, incorporating latest government guidance, and the visual impact of such development on the Green Belt. In the light of continuing changes in telecommunications technology, it is proposed to review and update the masterplan.

### **Policy RA8 - Brookmans Park Transmitting Station**

**Telecommunications and other related development at the Brookmans Park Transmitting Station will only be permitted where it is in accordance with the adopted masterplan and Policy R21 of the Plan.**

## **Cemeteries**

15.23 There may be a need for provision for additional burial space in the district within the Plan period. The existing cemeteries in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield are nearly full and there is no land identified within the towns and specified settlements for either extensions to existing cemeteries or new ones. Cemeteries are considered an appropriate Green Belt use and the Council will therefore consider the provision of new cemeteries in the Green Belt where they preserve its openness. The visual impact of any ancillary buildings and memorial stones on the surrounding landscape needs to be carefully considered. Cemeteries should be well located in relation to the road network and public transport facilities. Other types of burial site such as for woodland and green burials may also be acceptable.

### **Policy RA9 - Cemeteries and Memorial Gardens**

**Proposals for cemeteries, memorial gardens and sites for woodland and green burials may be permitted within the Green Belt only where:**

- (i) The site uses the existing landform and does not require re-contouring of the landscape;**
- (ii) The design of the site respects the character of the surrounding landscape, and appropriate landscaping and screening is provided to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and to prevent long views into the site;**
- (iii) The site is well located in relation to the road network, public transport links and near to existing settlements;**
- (iv) Associated buildings and memorial stones are small scale and unobtrusive.**

## **Landscape**

15.24 The character of the landscape in the district is especially valuable for the people who live there and reflects the historical and ongoing changes in the use of the land influenced by land ownership. Therefore, it is important that the character and the quality of the landscape are preserved.

15.25 To achieve this the 1993 District Plan and the 1998 Alterations identified Landscape Conservation Areas to protect areas of higher landscape quality.

However, the Structure Plan approved in 1998 proposes a new policy approach in line with the Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire. This defines six broad Landscape Regions in the county as a framework for more detailed policies in local plans to protect distinctive landscape features and habitats. Welwyn Hatfield is located within two regions, the Central River Valley and the South Herts Plateau. A landscape character assessment of the district has been undertaken and landscape character areas defined as part of Volume 2 of the Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire. The boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas are shown on the Proposals Map. The assessment of the character areas took as its starting point the six Hertfordshire Landscape Regions and introduced a finer grained analysis of the character of the rural areas. This analysis was based on physical influences such as topography, geology and soil type, vegetation and wildlife, as well as historical and cultural influences relating to land cover and land use. This analysis was then refined following stakeholder and community consultation. The methodology is set out in detail in the Hertfordshire Landscape Strategy Volume 2. The full landscape character assessment will be published as the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment. Proposals for development within the rural areas should be designed to conserve, maintain or enhance the local landscape character, as appropriate.

#### **Policy RA10 - Landscape Regions and Character Areas**

**Proposals for development in the rural areas will be expected to contribute, as appropriate, to the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the local landscape character of the area in which they are located, as defined in the Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment.**

#### **Watling Chase Community Forest**

15.26 Watling Chase Community Forest is one of 12 Community Forests being established in the country. Initiated by the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission, the aim of the project is to achieve major environmental improvements around towns and cities through the creation of a mosaic of wooded landscapes, leisure enterprises, areas for nature and public open spaces. The Watling Chase Community Forest is located in the south of Hertfordshire and covers an area of 72 square miles. It extends over the southwest part of Welwyn Hatfield covering approximately 9% of the district, including the Hatfield Aerodrome site. The Forest Plan was approved by government in March 1995. This was reviewed after 5 years, as the Forest Plan Review 2001, together with additions to the Forest Plan Landscape Assessment which was approved in February 2001. The more recent Landscape Character Appraisal contained in Volume 2 of the Landscape Strategy for Hertfordshire updates the Landscape Assessment for the Community Forest. These documents should be considered together and provide a full explanation of the Community Forest proposals. The main aims of Watling Chase Community Forest are:

- To increase tree planting to 30% cover for non urban areas;
- To produce a supply of home grown timber;

- To offer an alternative to agricultural use of land;
- To contribute to rural employment;
- To create attractive sites for people to enjoy;
- To enhance the natural beauty of the countryside;
- To create wildlife habitats;
- To reduce atmospheric pollution by absorbing pollutant gases.

15.27 PPG2 states that a Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and deciding planning applications and that any development within community forests in the Green Belt should be subject to normal Green Belt controls on development. The Council supports this advice and where relevant will take account of the Forest Plan in considering development proposals within its boundaries.

### **Policy RA11 - Watling Chase Community Forest**

**The boundaries of the Watling Chase Community Forest are as shown on the Proposals Map. Within the boundaries of the forest, the Council will seek to achieve the objectives of the Forest Plan in terms of planting, leisure and landscape improvement, where this accords with Green Belt policies. The Council will treat the Forest Plan as a material consideration in determining planning applications within its boundaries. Proposals for the provision of improved access to the forest and appropriate outdoor leisure and small scale recreational facilities will be permitted and will be required to be accompanied by substantial landscaping, including, where appropriate, woodland planting.**

### **Village Appraisals and Design Statements**

15.28 The involvement of local people in the way their village may or could change to retain or encourage a more thriving village life is crucial. A number of local community based environmental initiatives are well established such as Parish Maps, Village Appraisals and Village Design Statements. Village Appraisals are a comprehensive way of assessing what is important in village life to local people and provide a framework for the future. They cover all aspects of the village and are produced by the local community.

15.29 On the other hand, Village Design Statements can be approved as supplementary planning documents, provided they are produced using an appropriate methodology. They describe the visual, architectural and historical character of a village and show how the most important aspects of this character can be protected, enhanced and reflected in any new development that may occur. They are advisory documents, produced by the local community not the local planning authority and can help to influence how new development fits into a village. The Rural White Paper has re-emphasised this approach by encouraging villages to produce village plans, the design and land use aspects of which can be adopted as supplementary planning documents.

- 15.30 The Council will encourage local communities to produce Village Design Statements and village plans where they are prepared using an appropriate methodology and are subject to public consultation. Where appropriate the Council may adopt such statements and plans as supplementary planning documents.

## **Village Shops and Services**

### Protection of Village Facilities

- 15.31 The retention in rural areas of facilities such as shops, post offices, public houses, village halls, churches, and doctors' surgeries is of vital importance to local communities and to the aims of sustainable development. Without facilities it is difficult to prevent villages becoming dormitories for the main urban areas in the district.
- 15.32 Small villages in particular often have few or no facilities and have suffered from pressures for change of use from convenience retail uses to either specialist retailing uses, or non-retail uses, such as services, hot food outlets and in some cases, to residential use. In addition, high residential property prices combined with changes in the brewing industry have led to pressure to convert village pubs to residential use.
- 15.33 It is essential that villages provide a range of local facilities and that the remaining shops are not allowed to change to non-retail uses that can be provided elsewhere and which encourage travel. The Council will seek to retain the remaining retail function of these rural villages. The change of use of individual shops, not located in a parade, to non-retail use, will only be permitted where suitable alternative shopping facilities are available in the immediate locality.

### **Policy RA12 - Protection of Village Facilities**

**In the Green Belt settlements proposals that would result in the loss of local shops, public houses and other services and facilities will not be permitted unless the following criteria can be met:**

- (i) The existing use is proved to be no longer viable; the Council will expect the applicant to demonstrate, if requested, that the premises has remained vacant for over a year and to submit documentary evidence that all reasonable attempts to sell or let the premises for its existing use have failed; and**
- (ii) The loss of a local shop would not seriously diminish the provision of local shopping facilities, i.e. that there is another shop of a similar use available for customers within convenient walking distance; and**
- (iii) The alternative use would complement the character and function of the area, and would provide facilities to meet local needs.**

### Mixed Uses in Villages

- 15.34 In addition to protecting existing village facilities of settlements in the Green Belt, as defined in paragraph 4.13 of the Green Belt and Settlement Pattern chapter, the Council will encourage the provision of new local facilities. The

dual use of buildings for sustainable community provision will therefore be supported, as this can improve the vitality of villages. Examples of mixed uses in villages include the provision of a sub-post office and/or shop in a local pub, the provision of a shop at a local school and the use of a local pub as a community meeting place.

- 15.35 In some instances, the loss of residential accommodation may be outweighed by the need for a local facility and the benefits that such a use would bring, in terms of reducing the need to travel and improving the vitality of the village. In such cases, applicants will be required to demonstrate that a thorough search for an alternative location had proved unsuccessful, that there was a proven need for the facility in the area and that the benefit of the provision of the facility would outweigh the loss of residential accommodation.

### **Policy RA13 - Mixed Uses in Villages**

**The Council will permit development for the mixed use of existing buildings that provides services and facilities which meet the needs of local residents, within the Green Belt settlements where there is a proven need and it accords with the Green Belt policies.**

**Acceptable uses include local shops, post offices, public houses and meeting halls for social, cultural and religious uses, provided that the proposal would not harm the amenities of nearby residential properties and other uses.**

### **Rural Exceptions Sites**

- 15.36 PPG3 Annex B sets out guidelines for rural exceptions sites. It states that local planning authorities can include policies for rural exceptions sites where there is a demand for affordable housing. The Housing Needs Survey identified a requirement for a large number of affordable housing units which may not be met within the excluded settlements. As 79% of the district is covered by the Green Belt, the Council considers that a Rural Exceptions Policy should be included in the Plan where it can be justified for any site within and adjoining any Green Belt settlement. Each proposal for such a site will be assessed on its merits, including whether there is an identified local need (from an up-to-date housing needs survey) and on its ability to meet local needs where the benefits pass not only to the initial occupants but to the subsequent occupants as well. The site must also comply with other policies in the Plan and in particular the Green Belt policies. By local, the Council means village or parish level. The Council will not accept proposals for general market housing or mixed tenure site developments in the Green Belt being developed to cross-subsidise affordable housing on exceptions sites.

### **Policy RA14 - Rural Exceptions Sites**

**Outside the towns and specified settlements, permission may exceptionally be granted for small-scale affordable housing schemes to meet local needs on land within and adjoining any Green Belt settlements where development would usually be refused. The schemes will only be allowed where there is an identified local need from an up-**

**to-date housing needs survey and must respect the character and local distinctiveness of the settlement. Before planning permission is granted for a rural exceptions scheme, secure arrangements must be in place to ensure that all initial and subsequent occupiers of the properties have a specified identified need for local accommodation and that the benefits of affordability remain in perpetuity.**

### **Agricultural Land**

- 15.37 There are continuing changes in agriculture, especially with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and the effect of globalisation of the economy. There will be a shift away from paying direct subsidies for growing certain crops towards the idea of producing food in a more environmentally sensitive way.
- 15.38 Whatever these changes, there will be a need to retain the best quality agricultural land and soils for current and future generations. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has classified agricultural land into five grades. The best and most versatile land is made up of grades 1, 2, and 3a. This land offers the best opportunity for food production or forestry and should be safeguarded for the future. DEFRA requires to see all applications which would result in the loss of more than 20 hectares of the highest grade of agricultural land, or where it is likely that loss of less than 20 hectares would lead to further cumulative losses of greater than 20 hectares. If new uses or development are proposed they should be directed towards the lowest grade.

#### **Policy RA15 - Agricultural Land**

**Planning permission will not be granted for any form of development not associated with agriculture or forestry on the best and most versatile land (defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a) unless there is special justification for development that overrides the need to protect such land. Where there is special justification for development, it should be directed towards the lowest grade of land suitable for development.**

### **Rural Employment and Diversification**

- 15.39 The Council's main approach to employment in the district is set out in the Employment section. Rural employment is part of the overall economic activity of the district. The changes in agriculture have meant that farmers have looked to diversify into other activities. These may include arts and crafts, hobby farming, general light industrial use, tele-working, furniture making, computers, woodland management and farm based leisure activities, including rural tourism. Diversification will be supported but will be judged in terms of its sustainability, its contribution to the local economy, and its impact on the rural area. The use has also to be appropriate development in terms of Green Belt policy. Proposals for diversification, which would harm the overall viability of the unit will be resisted.

#### **Policy RA16 - Rural Employment and Diversification**

**Proposals for appropriate rural diversification will be permitted subject to the following criteria:**

- (i) The development should contribute to the viability of the unit and must be compatible with continued farming operations;**
- (ii) It would provide employment and contribute to the local economy;**
- (iii) It would be sustainable in terms of its impact on rural traffic and the surrounding environment; and**
- (iv) It would accord with Green Belt policies.**

### **Re-use of Rural Buildings**

- 15.40 Diversification may involve the re-use of existing rural buildings. PPS7 on 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' supports the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations and for some types of building. There are many acceptable types of business activity, including tourism, but the main concern is that the proposal should not result in over-intensification of the site, which would not be sustainable in a rural area, due to its impact on travel, traffic generation, and the character of the countryside. Rural buildings may also be of importance for biodiversity, for example old barns are often used by bats. Re-use should be sympathetic to these and other protected species, and help to meet the targets and priorities set out in the local Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 15.41 The re-use of buildings should not require substantial alterations to enable a new use, for example, building walls to an open-sided barn. Some existing buildings are unsuitable for retention because their siting, design and building materials have an adverse effect on the visual amenity of the area. Re-use of such buildings will not usually be acceptable.
- 15.42 There are concerns about buildings constructed under agricultural permitted development rights being converted to a new use without having ever been used for agriculture. In this case the Council would require evidence that the building was used for agriculture for a reasonable time and why it is no longer required.
- 15.43 Some rural buildings are of historical interest in that they are listed or form part of a group or historic farmyard or are within a registered Historic Park or Garden. These are dealt with in the Resources section of the Plan.

### **Policy RA17 - Re-use of Rural Buildings**

**The change of use or adaptation of rural buildings will be permitted provided that:**

- (i) The proposed use and any proposed extensions or alterations is are in accordance with Green Belt policies;**
- (ii) The intensity of use of the site does not substantially increase;**
- (iii) Any increase in traffic generated from the site is acceptable in environmental and highway terms;**

- (iv) There would be no adverse effects on protected species, identified in Policy R16 or other species, identified in the local Biodiversity Action Plan, which use such buildings;
- (v) The new activity is in sympathy with its surroundings and there is no adverse effect on the amenity of nearby residential properties and other uses;
- (vi) The existing structure is of a permanent nature and is not in such poor repair that it could only be brought back into use by complete or substantial reconstruction;
- (vii) Any proposed alterations would be in accordance with the design policies in the plan and the Supplementary Design Guidance; and
- (viii) In cases of agricultural buildings erected recently as a result of permitted development rights, clear evidence must be given to establish why the building is no longer suitable for agricultural use.

**Residential re-use will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated by the applicant that business re-use would be inappropriate and unviable. In addition, consideration will be given to the contribution made by the existing use to the rural economy and whether its loss would prejudice village vitality.**

### **New Agricultural Buildings**

15.44 Part of the attractiveness of the rural landscape is the way that buildings can enhance it. Development needs to respect its setting and the local context in terms of scale, design, materials and location and should contribute to a sense of local identity. The use of village design statements and the classification of landscape character will be helpful. Some agricultural buildings do not require planning permission; those that do are defined in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. There is a requirement on farm units of five hectares or more that the farmer or other developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether their prior approval is needed for certain details. There are also stricter limitations on permitted development on small agricultural units of less than five hectares but greater than 0.4 hectares in area.

### **Policy RA18 - New Agricultural Buildings**

**Where planning permission is required for new agricultural buildings, consent will only be granted where:**

- (i) The proposal would not harm the character of the surrounding landscape in terms of its siting, design and appearance;
- (ii) It would accord with the design policies of the Plan and the Supplementary Design Guidance;
- (iii) It would have no adverse impact on the amenities of nearby residential properties and other uses.

**Where prior approval is required, approval will only be given if the proposal meets criteria (i) and (ii).**

### **Temporary Agricultural Accommodation**

- 15.45 PPS7 advises that although normally agricultural workers should live in nearby towns or villages, there may be situations where the work concerned may require a full time worker to live on site. Although the Council has no wish to restrict genuine new agricultural or forestry businesses, the objectives of the Green Belt would be compromised by a proliferation of dwellings in rural areas. Therefore, applicants must be able to demonstrate that the enterprise is viable and requires an on-site worker before a permanent dwelling will be considered.
- 15.46 Temporary dwellings will therefore be strictly controlled and applications will be investigated to establish recent land uses and whether, for example, any dwellings have recently been sold separately from the farm holding, indicating evidence of lack of agricultural need. Temporary permission for accommodation will not be granted where a permanent dwelling would not be permitted.

### **Policy RA19 - Temporary Agricultural Accommodation**

**Temporary residential accommodation in association with new agricultural or forestry enterprises will only be permitted where:**

- (i) It can be demonstrated by the applicant that the functional needs of the enterprise require on-site residential accommodation and that the enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis;**
- (ii) It can be demonstrated that there is no other suitable existing accommodation available for workers on-site or in the surrounding area;**
- (iii) The proposed temporary accommodation meets the Design policies in the Plan and the Supplementary Design Guidance;**
- (iv) The need for new accommodation is not as a result of the loss of the existing dwelling through sale or fragmentation of the land.**

**Only one temporary consent will be issued for a period not exceeding three years, following which further temporary consents will not be permitted. Any temporary accommodation should be removed at the end of the consent period.**

### **Permanent Agricultural Dwellings**

- 15.47 All applications for permanent agricultural dwellings will be carefully considered to avoid abuse of the planning system. The Council accepts that some small extensions to existing buildings may be necessary and that changes in agriculture or forestry may result in a demand for replacement or new residential buildings.

15.48 Proposals for permanent accommodation must demonstrate a continuing functional requirement following a temporary permission. In addition the enterprise needs to be financially viable and should provide evidence of this. There should be no need for a large house in the Green Belt and the size of the dwelling should be consistent with the need to house a worker and his or her immediate family. The requirements of occupancy will be implemented through the use of planning conditions or Section 106 agreements. Where the requirement for agricultural occupancy is no longer needed, before granting planning permission the Council will need to be satisfied that the accommodation cannot contribute towards an identified need for local affordable housing.

#### **Policy RA20 - Permanent Agricultural Dwellings**

**Permanent accommodation in association with agricultural or forestry enterprises will only be permitted where:**

- (i) the enterprise can demonstrate a continuing functional requirement for a worker or workers to be on site at all times;**
- (ii) the enterprise can demonstrate that it is financially viable;**
- (iii) the size of the proposed dwelling relates directly to the needs of the agricultural holding;**
- (iv) the proposed accommodation is in accordance with the Design policies in the Plan and the Supplementary Design Guidance.**

**Planning permission will be granted for the removal of any agricultural occupancy condition only in exceptional circumstances. Evidence must be submitted to prove that there is no longer any agricultural or forestry demand for the dwelling either by any associated or unassociated holding in the locality, or failing this it is unable to satisfy an identified need for local affordable housing.**

#### **Leisure and Tourism in the Countryside**

15.49 The use of the countryside for leisure is important to many people's quality of life in the district. Leisure activities and tourism can also provide another form of diversification from agriculture. There has to be a balance between the use of the countryside for recreation and protecting its character and environmental assets, which can include landscape, tranquillity and ecology. Leisure activities range from traditional country pursuits such as fishing, hunting, shooting and walking to banger racing, motor cycling, water sports, golf, paint ball games, mountain biking and horse riding. Tourism may also become more important in the rural areas following diversification. In addition the location and development of leisure and tourism uses in rural areas must be considered in terms of their sustainability and opportunities need to be available within and near settlements. New leisure uses should also show how they relate to the needs of the local community.

#### **Policy RA21 - Leisure and Tourism in the Countryside**

**Proposals for recreational development, which may include changes of use in the countryside will be permitted where:**

- (i) **The proposed use is in accordance with Green Belt policies;**
- (ii) **The proposed use would not have an adverse effect on the amenity of neighbouring properties, nor the character and other environmental assets of the countryside;**
- (iii) **The proposal would be accessible by means of passenger transport, cycleways, footpaths and bridleways;**
- (iv) **Existing buildings are re-used if possible;**
- (v) **New buildings that are permitted in accordance with (i) should reflect the local rural character in terms of design, massing and materials; and**
- (vi) **Any new development must be acceptable in terms of its impact on the highway network, including highway safety.**

### **Golf Courses**

15.50 Golf is a popular sport and this district has been seen as particularly suitable for golf course development. Although courses can be seen as an acceptable use in the Green Belt they can substantially change the rural landscape and bring with them pressure for ancillary development. The need for land contouring should be minimised and on-site material should be used. The importation of materials will not be permitted, except for specialist materials which may need to be imported for the construction of bunkers, greens and water features. Golf courses are best located in the urban fringes where there are public transport links rather than in isolated countryside. The environmental effects of courses must also be considered especially in terms of their effect on natural habitats and their requirement for substantial amounts of water. The need for water consumption should be minimised, and as far as possible measures should be identified to store water on site during winter in order to provide for irrigation in the summer. Small pitch and putt courses and driving ranges are best located in the urban area. New 18-hole golf courses will require an Environmental Impact Assessment under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999. The EIA should include the following information; a landscape survey and appraisal of the site, a wildlife habitat appraisal, and a preliminary archaeological assessment, details of existing Public Rights of Way, and a balance sheet of gains and losses resulting from the development of the golf course. Within the Watling Chase Community Forest area a substantial area of new tree planting should be included as part of the design of any new course.

### **Policy RA22 - Golf Courses**

**Planning permission for golf courses will only be granted where all of the following criteria are met:**

- (i) **New development necessary for the operation of the golf course should be small scale and ancillary to the use of the golf course; the re-use of existing redundant buildings should be considered first; no residential accommodation will be permitted;**

- (ii) The development (including any buildings) will not have an adverse effect on the appearance and character of the local rural area including its landscape features and its historical and archaeological interest;
- (iii) The design of the course retains existing landscape features and the need for land contouring is minimised - importation of materials to the site will not be permitted, except for the construction of bunkers, greens and water features;
- (iv) The design and landscaping of the course should enhance biodiversity by retention of existing natural habitats, creation of appropriate new habitats and by taking into account the objectives of the local Biodiversity Action Plan;
- (v) Any new development must be acceptable in terms of its impact on the highway network and highway safety. A transport assessment will be required in accordance with Policy M2 which will include the accessibility of the site by a choice of modes of transport;
- (vi) The site for the course is large enough to accommodate, as a minimum, a full nine-hole course and will not include any driving ranges or additional recreational uses unconnected with golf; and
- (vii) The course design and choice of grass and tree species should minimise water use and alternative water supplies to abstraction from the aquifer or river should be provided to service the course.

The proposal will be expected to be in accordance with the Design policies in the Plan and the Supplementary Design Guidance. Floodlighting will not normally be acceptable.

### **Noisy Recreational Activities**

15.51 Noisy sports such as motor sports, clay pigeon shooting and paintball games are increasingly popular in the countryside and there is a particular demand for motor cycle scrambling. The siting of such uses is very sensitive because of the environmental problems they can create, including damage to the landscape, natural habitats and noise problems. They also need to be well located in relation to public transport routes and should be sited where the background noise level is already high. The impact of such development also needs to be minimised by appropriate screening and landscaping.

### **Policy RA23 - Motor Sports and Other Noisy Recreational Activities**

Planning permission will only be granted for motor sports and motor cycle scrambling facilities, clay pigeon shooting, paintball games and other noisy or intrusive recreational activities where all of the following criteria can be met:

- (i) The activity will not harm the amenity of any residential property;
- (ii) The activity will not prejudice the functioning of any agricultural enterprise;

- (iii) **The activity will not have an adverse effect on the appearance and character of the local rural area including its environmental assets, landscape qualities and historical interest;**
- (iv) **The activity will not harm the amenity value of the area for informal recreation;**
- (v) **The activity will not harm the biodiversity of the area;**
- (vi) **It will not generate any demand for new buildings; and**
- (vii) **It is in accordance with Policy RA28 New Development using Rural Roads and will not prejudice safety and convenience of road, bridleway and footpath users.**

### **Riding and Livery Stables**

15.52 Riding is an important leisure activity in the district and there is continuing demand for development of stabling facilities. Riding and livery stables can have a detrimental impact on the countryside, in terms of the number and scale of buildings they introduce, creation of maneges, frequent over-grazing of pastures and the fragmentation of land holdings that can occur. There may also be potential adverse impacts on nearby sites of wildlife importance. New buildings should therefore be small scale. They should also be located so as to minimise the potential for conflict on the roads between cars and horse riders, wherever possible having direct links into the bridleway network.

#### **Policy RA24 - Riding and Livery Stables**

**Planning permission will be granted for small scale riding and livery stables, subject to the following criteria:**

- (i) **The impact on the Green Belt;**
- (ii) **The number, size, height and materials of buildings proposed;**
- (iii) **Their relationship to existing buildings and the surrounding area reflecting the rural character and landscape;**
- (iv) **Their effect on neighbouring properties i.e. smell and noise;**
- (v) **Their effect on environmental assets such as wildlife habitats; and**
- (vi) **Consideration of the standards for the safety and comfort of horses recommended by the Countryside Agency and The British Horse Society.**

**New residential accommodation needed for the maintenance of the stables will not be permitted.**

**Proposals will not be permitted unless local roads are able to accommodate the anticipated additional vehicular traffic and links are provided from the site which give riders direct access to the bridleway network where appropriate. The implementation of these requirements will be achieved through the use of planning conditions or Section 106 agreements.**

### **Access to the Countryside**

- 15.53 The Council wishes to promote informal leisure for everyone in the countryside while restricting traffic growth. This is important for people's health and quality of life. Footpaths, bridleways and cycleways provide a healthy alternative to the car. There can be conflicts between users and landowners, with a disregard by users of the countryside code and obstructions by some landowners. The County Council is now primarily responsible for maintenance of public rights of way. The County Council has produced a Good Practice Guide for Rights of Way which gives guidance of standards required which developers should adhere to. The District Council wishes to promote a positive approach to maintaining rights of way and supports the County Council in conjunction with the Countryside Management Service in its aim to define, waymark, maintain and improve the public rights of way network.
- 15.54 Although the Council is not directly responsible for the rights of way network it can control the design of development in relation to rights of way. The setting of an existing footpath usually adds to the enjoyment of the users and this can be badly affected by unsympathetic development. The Council will resist development that adversely affects the setting and amenity of existing definitive rights of way and where appropriate will seek improvements through planning conditions and S106 agreements in order to compensate for the increased use of public rights of way resulting from new development.

#### **Policy RA25 - Public Rights of Way**

**The Council will work with other organisations to promote the maintenance and improvement of the public rights of way network in the district. Planning permission will not be granted for development in the countryside which adversely affects the convenience, safety, setting and amenity of an existing definitive public right of way. The diversion of a public right of way will only be supported where the new route is as least as attractive, safe and convenient for public use. The implementation of these requirements will be achieved through the use of planning conditions or Section 106 agreements.**

#### **Horse Riding and Bridleways**

- 15.55 Horse ownership levels are significant and the popularity of riding as a leisure activity is increasing. Where riders use ordinary roads there is potential conflict with motor vehicles. Narrow lanes with limited visibility and little room for manoeuvre can be hazardous and inexperienced riders are particularly vulnerable. The Council therefore supports the improvement and extension of the bridleway network. Proposals for farm diversification or the use of land and buildings to provide new riding or livery stables should not add to potential conflict on the roads. Instead they can provide an opportunity to create further links in the network of bridleways. A London Orbital Bridle Route (the 'H25') is being created and will cross the southern boundary of the district. This is not an entirely new route but is being made up by linking existing bridleways. It will provide a regional link for the local network, which the Council supports.

## **Policy RA26 - Bridleways**

**Proposals which support the improvement and extension of the bridleway network in the district, including the creation of a London Orbital Bridle Route, will be permitted subject to other policies in the Plan.**

## **Greenways**

15.56 Dual or multiple use of cycleways for horse riding can help to increase the network of safe routes open to riders. However, dual use of cycleways can create conflict between users and requires different surface treatments. In addition, legally horse riders may not use cycleways. However, there are off-road routes where dual use is workable and the Council would support the expansion of this network of routes. One particular initiative is the 'Greenways' initiative, being developed by the Countryside Agency, the aim of which is to create a network of largely car-free off road routes for shared use by walkers, bikers and riders. One of the aims of the Watling Chase Community Forest is to improve access into the area of the forest and a pilot 'Greenways' scheme is taking place there in Hertsmere borough. There may be opportunities to extend the scheme into that part of the forest within Welwyn Hatfield District subject to resources.

## **Policy RA27 - Greenways**

**Proposals which support the development of a 'Greenways' network in the district, to enable shared use of off-road routes by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, will be permitted subject to other policies in the Plan.**

## **Sustainable Transport in Rural Areas**

15.57 Rural areas have specific traffic management problems and other movement issues but they have traditionally not received the priority given to transport in urban areas. This deficiency is being addressed in the Sustainable Transport in Rural Areas Project (STRAP). STRAP is a research and development project by Hertfordshire County Council and the Countryside Agency, which covers the rural area bounded by Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, St. Albans and Harpenden. The boundary of the STRAP area is shown on the map in Appendix 8.

15.58 The long term aims of the project put forward in STRAP's Rural Transport Strategy are to:

- Reduce commuter traffic passing through the area by better management of the road networks;
- To improve access for people without cars to travel to, and within the village area and to outside locations;
- To investigate the opportunities for land use planning and service provision, through the better location of developments and associated facilities, to reduce the need to travel;
- To seek to secure a personal commitment from individual residents to reduce their car travel.

15.59 The Hertfordshire Rural Transport Partnership consists of the Countryside Agency, Hertfordshire County Council Passenger Transport Unit and the Community Development Agency for Hertfordshire. Its main aims are enhancing rural transport services to secure a long term improvement in access to services and facilities for rural people, and to develop transport choices with a range of accessible passenger and sustainable community based transport and sustainable alternatives to the use of the car. The Council will work with the County Council and the Countryside Agency in support of STRAP and the Hertfordshire Rural Transport Partnership in order to gain understanding of and introduce improvements to rural transport in the district.

### **Rural Roads**

15.60 The narrow winding nature of rural roads is a major contribution to the character and quality of the countryside. There may be conflicts however between different users, for example agricultural vehicles and commuter traffic, and problems with the volume of traffic on these roads. There are complementary methods of dealing with these problems. The County Council's initiative to implement a programme for the introduction of 30mph speed limits for all settlements with 10 or more properties along a rural route should give relief from noise and vibration and greater safety for local people. In planning terms the Council intends to restrict new development and the expansion of existing development which would have an adverse impact on rural traffic and would require road improvements which would substantially alter the character of the rural roads.

#### **Policy RA28 - New Development using Rural Roads**

**The Council, in association with the County Council, will not permit developments which are expected to increase or to change the type of traffic on local rural roads where:**

- (i) The road is poor in terms of width, alignment or structural conditions; or**
- (ii) The increased traffic would have an adverse effect on the local environment, either to the rural character of the road or the residential properties along it.**

## GLOSSARY

**Affordable Housing:** This term is used to encompass both low cost market and subsidised housing (irrespective of tenure, ownership - whether exclusive or shared - or financial arrangements) that will be available to people who cannot afford to occupy houses generally available on the open market.

**Area of Special Restraint:** An area of land within which no development will be permitted until such time as a review of the District Plan determines that the land is required for development.

**Ancient Monument:** Nationally important archaeological sites designated by the Secretary of State for the Environment under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

**Article 4 Direction:** A special power which the Council may exercise to control development in sensitive areas not normally subject to planning control (Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995).

**Agriculture/Agricultural:** Includes horticulture, fruit growing, seed growing, dairy farming, the breeding and keeping of livestock (including any creature kept for the production of food, wool, skins or fur, or for the purpose of its use in the farming of land), the use of land as grazing land, meadow land, osier land, market gardens and nursery grounds, and the use of land for woodlands where that use is ancillary to the farming of land for other agricultural purposes (as defined in Section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

**Agricultural Building:** Any building on agricultural land comprised in an agricultural unit reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within that unit.

**Agricultural Land:** Land in use for agriculture for the purpose of trade or business and excluding any dwelling house or garden.

**Agricultural Unit:** Agricultural land which is occupied as a unit for the purpose of agriculture, including:

- a) any dwelling or other building on that land occupied for the purpose of farming the land by the same person as occupies the unit; or
- b) any dwelling on that land occupied by a farmworker.

**Bad Neighbour Uses:** these are uses such as blood-boiling, abattoirs and car paint spraying. They are likely to produce noxious smells and generally unpleasant disturbance to adjacent uses/areas.

**Best Practical Environmental Option (BPEO):** Defined by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution as “the outcome of a systematic consultative and decision making procedure which emphasises the protection and conservation of the environment across land, air and water. The procedure establishes the option that provides the most benefits or the least damage to the environment, as a whole, at acceptable cost, in the long term as well as in the short term.

**Biodiversity:** biological diversity in an environment as indicated by the presence of numbers of different species of plants and animals.

**Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP):** A framework for achieving the conservation of biodiversity based on the targeting of resources towards protecting priority habitats and species.

**Brownfield Land:** (see Previously Developed Land)

**Bridleway Network:** means bridleways, byways, quiet roads, and tracks used by horse riders and other non-motorised modes.

**Circular:** (see Government Circulars)

**Comparison Shopping/Floorspace:** shopping involving the purchase of non-food goods, where the customer will compare the same products in different shops before purchasing e.g. clothes, footwear, electrical goods, furniture.

**Community Forest:** National programme initiated by the Countryside Commission. The main aims of the Forest are to protect and improve the landscape, increase access, recreation and art opportunities, protect areas of and for nature conservation, provide educational opportunities and encourage timber production.

**Commuted Sum:** this is a sum of money paid to a Local Authority by a developer (often under a Section 106 Agreement) to effect provision of facilities or improvement connected with a development. It is often found as a 'commuted sum for parking' - money paid by a developer to provide parking elsewhere, when parking connected with a development is inadequate.

**Conservation Area:** an area of special architectural or historic interest defined by the Local Authority. It is an area deemed to be worthy of preservation or enhancement due to its special character or appearance (see S.69 and 70 of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

**Convenience Shopping/Floorspace:** superstores, supermarkets and shops selling food, newspapers, confectionery and other similar goods for daily use.

**Countryside Management Service:** this service seeks to find practical solutions to problems in the countryside. It enables organisations and groups to liaise and work towards a better management of the countryside and to promote the service aims of providing 'countryside for all'.

**County Structure Plan:** strategic plan prepared by Hertfordshire County Council showing the proposed future pattern of land use and broad planning policies for Hertfordshire. Each County is required by Central Government to prepare a Structure Plan.

**Curtilage:** the area of enclosed land associated with the use of a building, such as the garden of a house, but excluding any fields, paddocks, etc.

**dB(A):** - Unit of noise measurement which expresses the loudness in terms of decibel (dB) scale and the frequency rating factor (A).

**DEFRA:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Development Brief:** (see Planning Brief)

**Development Plan:** The development plan for an area consists of the approved Structure Plan, the Local (or District) Plan and any Minerals or Waste Plans which are in force for that area (see Section 54 Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

**Estate Management Scheme:** the Estate Management Scheme which operates in Welwyn Garden City was taken over by Welwyn Hatfield Council in 1978, from the Commission for the New Towns. The scheme consists of a number of covenants and controls which exceed normal planning powers. This is to safeguard the detailed design and landscaping features found in Welwyn Garden City from even small alterations which might harm the overall character of an area.

**EU:** European Union.

**Examination in Public:** the public inquiry held to discuss representations made during public consultation on the Structure Plan. Only invited parties may speak at the EIP which is held before a panel of people chosen by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

**G.P.D.O:** The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. Statutory Document from Central Government giving rules and definitions regarding development of land for the Local Planning Authority.

**General Industrial Development:** this is industrial and manufacturing development which broadly falls within Class B2 of the Use Classes Order.

**Government Circulars:** provide Central Government guidance on a wide range of planning issues to supplement the Town and Country Planning legislation (also see PPGs and PPSs).

**Green Belt:** (sometimes known as the Metropolitan Green Belt) the area of open land and countryside around London which is designated as 'Green Belt' and which has a number of functions:

- to restrict urban sprawl
- to protect the countryside from development
- to keep neighbouring settlements separate
- to preserve historic towns
- to help in the regeneration of urban areas.

**Gross Floorspace:** The total floorspace of the building measured to the outside of all external walls including staircase, lobbies, porches and circulation space.

**Habitat:** A term used in describing the location and characteristics of sites particular to different species of plants and animals.

**Hectare (Ha):** A metric measurement of area equal to 2.47 acres.

**Horticulture:** (see Agriculture)

**Housing Association:** Independent non-profitmaking organisations for managing building and renovating housing. Funded by Central Government through the Housing Corporation they can also receive funds from Local Authorities.

**Leq (16 hour) dB(A):** Daytime index for aircraft noise, measured between the hours of 7am and 11pm.

**Listed Building:** a building which has been identified by the Secretary of State for the Environment as being of special architectural or historic interest and is entered on the Listed Building Schedules under S.1 of The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as such are subject to special planning control. Listed Building Consent is required for alterations or demolitions. The buildings are classified in Grades to show their relative importance:

Grade I	Buildings of exceptional interest (less than 5% of all Listed Buildings)
Grade II*	Buildings of Special Interest and of Particular Importance
Grade II	Buildings of Special Interest.

**Landscape Conservation Area:** An area which has been assessed as having significant scenic beauty to warrant particular measures to retain its character (broadly assessed and defined in the County Structure Plan).

**Local Agenda 21:** Sustainable development strategy developed by and for the local community.

**Local Housing Needs:** A term used to describe the range of housing requirements arising from the existing population including different types of ownership and house type.

**Local Nature Reserve:** Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended), Local Authorities have powers to establish Local Nature Reserves in consultation with English Nature. Such reserves are intended to provide significant opportunities for public involvement in nature conservation at a small-scale local level.

**Non-Conforming Use:** for the purpose of this Plan, a use which does not conform with surrounding land uses and is therefore not appropriate in its present location.

**ODPM:** Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

**Permitted Development Rights:** these allow certain types of development to occur without needing planning permission. The types of development are described in the G.P.D.O.

**Planning Brief:** a document designed to give planning guidance for a particular site; it may outline any desired uses which the Council feels are appropriate to the site's location e.g. elderly persons dwellings in the town centre.

**PPGs:** Planning Policy Guidance notes produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to provide guidance on planning policies in a simpler and more accessible form than Government circulars. Current PPGs are listed in Appendix 9.

**PPS:** Planning Policy Statement issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Current PPSs are listed in Appendix 7.

**Previously Developed Land:** land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings), and associated fixed surface infrastructure. The definition covers the curtilage of the development. It may occur in both built-up and rural settings. It includes defence buildings and land used for mineral extraction and waste disposal, where provision for restoration has not been made through development control procedures. The definition excludes land and buildings currently in use for agriculture or forestry, and land in built-up areas which has not been developed previously (e.g. parks, recreation grounds and allotments - even though these areas may contain certain buildings). Also excluded is land that was previously developed but where the remains of any structure or activity have blended into the landscape and where there is a clear reason that could outweigh the re-use of the site (*definition taken from Annex C to PPG3*).

**Private Finance Initiatives:** Also known as 'Public Private Partnerships' are a mechanism set up by Central Government to enable private sector capital to fund what were previously regarded as public sector responsibilities e.g. road building and hospitals.

**RPGs:** Regional Planning Policy Guidance Notes produced by the ODPM to provide planning guidance at a regional level. This district is currently covered by RPG9 for the South East.

**Section 106:** Legal agreement under planning law to secure elements of development that cannot be controlled by planning conditions.

**Sequential Test:** A test to be applied in the selection of sites that directs new retail and leisure development to town centres where possible. First preference for sites should be the town centre, where suitable sites are available, followed by edge-of-centre sites, district and local centres, and only then by out-of-centre sites in locations that are, or can be made, accessible by a choice of means of transport. Edge-of-centre sites may be defined as those within walking distance (200-300 metres) of the main town centre shopping area. Out-of-centre sites are those which are clearly separate from the town centre itself, but which are not necessarily outside the urban area.

**SERPLAN:** the London and South East Regional Planning Conference. An organisation dealing with strategic planning and transportation issues in the South East established in 1962.

**Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs):** these are notified by English Nature under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They comprise land of special interest because of its flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features, but not managed as a reserve.

**Specified Settlements:** settlements (i.e. towns and villages) which are excluded from the Green Belt.

**Special Area of Conservation:** These are designated under the EC Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the Habitats Directive) and are Nature Conservation Sites of European Importance.

**Strategic Housing Requirements:** number of new houses identified in the Structure Plan as being required to meet the district's contribution to general housing requirements in the county.

**Strategic Road Network:** these are the important national and county through-routes of regional significance which link major centres of population. These include motorways, major trunk roads and some principal 'A' roads.

**Sui Generis:** a legal term, used in planning law, to describe a use which falls outside of the defined uses in the Use Classes Order, and therefore does not qualify for the rights given to uses falling within those classes.

**Use Classes:** Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, a statutory document defining different categories of use of land and buildings for planning purposes.

**Vitality and Viability of Town/Local Centres:** Vitality is a measure of how busy a centre is. Viability is a measure of its economic health and its capacity to attract continuing investment.

**Wildlife Site:** Local sites identified by locally-developed criteria which are the most important non-statutory sites for wildlife.

**Windfall Housing Sites:** Unexpected sites which become available for new housing.