

Introduction

- 3.1 Mid Sussex is characterised by a number of towns and villages located within an extensive area of very attractive countryside. This high quality rural landscape is not only a distinctive and valuable resource in its own right but also provides a very important setting for the built-up areas. Two areas, the High Weald and the Sussex Downs, are of such quality that they form part of nationally important Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- 3.2 In April 2000, the Countryside Agency began the process of designating the South Downs as a National Park. Widespread consultation has been carried out by the Countryside Agency with the public and local authorities, with over 6,500 written responses received by the Agency. A Designation Order was signed on 18th December 2002 and placed on deposit for inspection until February 2003. A public inquiry into the proposed National Park designation began in November 2003 and will run until Summer/Autumn 2004. Further information on the proposed designation can be obtained from the Countryside Agency.
- 3.3 In the countryside, as elsewhere, there are competing demands for the use of land. There is considerable pressure for the towns and villages to expand particularly as they are attractive locations in which to live and work and benefit from good accessibility. Changes within the rural areas themselves are also placing new demands on the countryside. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy has led to large amounts of land being taken out of production and has created a general uncertainty about the future of the agricultural industry. This has led to pressure for developments associated with the diversification of the rural economy including the search for alternative uses of buildings and land. There are also pressures for the countryside to accommodate a wide range of activities, in particular those related to informal recreation and tourism.
- 3.4 It is anticipated that these pressures will continue during the period of this Plan and could increase as landowners seek to ensure the most economic use of their land and buildings in order to sustain agriculture and other rural businesses. It is anticipated that the needs of rural communities in respect of housing, services and employment are also likely to increase.
- 3.5 The underlying aim of this Plan's policies for the countryside is to safeguard it for its own sake and secure its protection and enhancement, preventing inappropriate development. Additional policies of protection are included for particularly sensitive areas of countryside where very firm restraint is required.
- 3.6 It is accepted, however, that there are a number of activities that are traditionally located in the countryside and that are essential to maintain or renew the local rural economy or the needs of rural communities. The Plan contains policies which assist the rural economy.
- 3.7 While much management takes place outside the scope of the planning system it is important that such schemes and development are co-ordinated to achieve positive long term results. A detailed action programme for the management of the countryside has been drawn up within the West Sussex Rural Strategy and a number of task groups have been set up to tackle particular issues. This strategy, prepared by the County Council in association with the District Councils and countryside interest groups, aims to provide a framework within which organisations involved in the countryside can work together. Mid Sussex District Council will continue to be closely involved with the development of the Rural Strategy as it evolves in the future. Detailed management plans have also been prepared for the AONBs.

Character of the Countryside in Mid Sussex

- 3.8 The landscape of the District ranges from the ridges and valleys of the High Weald in the north, across the more gentle landscape of the Low Weald in the centre, to the steep scarp slope of the Sussex Downs in the south. The general rise and fall of the landscape throughout the District gives rise to a number of extensive views across the countryside, highlighting its varied character.
- 3.9 The geology of the High Weald, comprising mostly sands and soft sandstones intermingled with clays, gives rise to a distinctive landscape of ridges and valleys. Superimposed on this are the manmade features of small farms and woodlands, historic parks, sunken lanes and ridge top villages. The Low Weald has a more open pattern of fields, hedgerows and areas of woodland, reflecting a gentler landscape. Much of the former Wealden Forest has gone but there are still abundant areas of broadleaved woodland, intermixed with more recent conifer plantations. Remnants of the earlier Wealden iron industry are still apparent in some areas, such as former hammer ponds, which add interest to the landscape.
- 3.10 The north facing scarp slope of the South Downs is a very prominent landscape feature in the District. The coombes or dry valleys give a unique character to the hills, especially when they are accentuated in heavy shadow in the early morning or late evening. Much of the scarp slope retains remnants of downland turf, although in places scrub and woodland may obscure the precise shape of the landform.
- 3.11 The variable topography and geology of the District has also given rise to a variety of wildlife habitats of importance to nature conservation. Rare habitats exist such as unimproved chalk grassland on the South Downs. These have been supplemented by the creation of more recent man-made features important for nature conservation such as Ardingly Reservoir.

Policy Context

- 3.12 Policies for the protection of the rural areas in Mid Sussex are long established. The safeguarding of the countryside has long been a cornerstone of both national and regional policy guidance and has been a central feature of successive Structure and Local Plans. In formulating policies and proposals for the countryside in this Local Plan, the Council has had regard to the most up-to-date national, regional and county planning policies and the current thinking on sustainable development. All policies and proposals in this Chapter must be set against the general strategy for the future of Mid Sussex outlined in Chapter 2. This includes the need to ensure that any development which does take place is carried out in a sustainable manner.

National and Regional Planning Policy

- 3.13 Past trends in the countryside, particularly as a result of economic changes affecting agriculture, are reflected in current government guidance. PPG 7: The Countryside states that the Government believes it is important to sustain the process of diversification, and accommodate change, whilst at the same time protecting the countryside for the sake of its beauty, the diversity of its landscape, the wealth of its natural resources and its ecological, agricultural and recreational value. A healthy rural economy is regarded as being amongst the best ways of protecting and improving the countryside, with diversification providing a range of employment opportunities for its residents. The commitment to the protection of the countryside is maintained, however,

in that, generally, new development should benefit the rural economy and maintain or enhance the environment. It is acknowledged that new building in the open countryside should be strictly controlled. In areas specifically identified for their landscape, wildlife or historic qualities, planning policies will give greater priority to restraint of development.

- 3.14 PPG 7 regards Development Plans as the means by which development to sustain the rural economy can be accommodated whilst protecting the countryside.
- 3.15 The Government's policies for the countryside are also set out in the 2000 White Paper, 'Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England'. This paper re-iterates the guidance contained in PPG 7, stating that the countryside is a national asset which must be managed in a sustainable way.
- 3.16 Regional guidance for the South East Region, as set out in RPG 9 published in March 1994, places a strong emphasis on achieving sustainability and protecting the environment. It advocates the firm protection of sensitive areas of countryside. Although it is accepted in the guidance that some small scale development may be necessary in rural areas to sustain the economy, on the whole emphasis should be on the re-use of urban land rather than on greenfield development.

West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 - 2016

- 3.17 The Mid Sussex Local Plan Revised Deposit Draft 2001 was prepared alongside the Third Review of the West Sussex Structure Plan 1998 (Not Formally Adopted). The first objective of the Third Review is to ensure that the development or use of land is sustainable, which includes ensuring that it will not cause irretrievable loss of natural resources or environmental assets. This emphasis on sustainability and the protection of the environment is particularly relevant to the countryside. The West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 – 2016 continues this emphasis and has three principal aims: meeting the diverse needs of communities and businesses, protecting the distinctive character of towns and villages and the countryside, and protecting the environment and using natural resources and assets wisely. It goes on to say that in the countryside protection will be sought against development which does not need to be there with only limited exceptions allowed under other policies (LOC2). The countryside will continue to be protected for its own sake, and development proposals within particularly sensitive areas such as AONBs, strategic gaps, and sites of importance to nature conservation, will be subject to the most rigorous examination. Only in compelling circumstances will development be permitted within areas of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.
- 3.18 The West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 – 2016 recognises, however, that the countryside is a home and a workplace, and that there is a need to strike a balance between the community's needs and environmental conservation, although within AONBs the balance is firmly in favour of conservation. In line with Government guidance it regards the conservation of the countryside as dependant upon a healthy rural economy. The Structure Plan states that it is desirable to accommodate continuing change in the rural economy, and to enable appropriate forms of diversification where this will not damage the countryside. Small scale development and provision of services may therefore be permitted where these will assist in the evolution of rural communities, providing the environment is not harmed (LOC1, LOC2 and NE10).
- 3.19 Issues relating to mineral working are set out in both the West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 - 2016 and the West Sussex Minerals Local Plan 2003, the County Council being the Mineral Planning Authority for West Sussex.

Policy Aims

- 3.20 The aims of the Local Plan's strategy towards planning for the future of the countryside in Mid Sussex are:
- (a) to protect the countryside for its own sake from inappropriate development and to conserve its overall appearance and character;
 - (b) to support a countryside of varied and productive economic and social activity where this would not result in unnecessary development which could harm its character and to ensure that any development takes place in a sustainable manner;
 - (c) to define the built-up areas of towns and villages and to define and retain the strategic and local gaps between them in order to prevent their coalescence and to protect their individual identity and amenity;
 - (d) to protect and, where possible, enhance the appearance and special distinctive landscape characteristics of AONBs;
 - (e) to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land; and
 - (f) to protect wildlife, their habitats and the special features of areas designated as being of ecological importance, having regard to the relevant significance of designations, in order to conserve their abundance and diversity.

Policies and Proposals for the Countryside

The Distinction Between the Countryside and the Built-up Areas

- 3.21 In this Local Plan the countryside is defined as all land which falls outside the built-up area boundaries. It is, therefore, important to establish at the outset the clear distinction between the built-up areas and the countryside since this is fundamental to the effective application of the land use policies in this Plan. The West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 - 2016 defines the built-up area boundary as the line which separates urban land, identified as being able to accommodate a limited amount of growth, from the countryside, which is subject to development restraint. It is thus a policy boundary rather than an indication of what currently exists. The precise definition of built-up area boundaries is a matter for Local Plans.
- 3.22 Built-up area boundaries have been defined around the towns and larger villages in the District by the application of a number of criteria. A number of technical reports have been produced which explain these criteria more fully. Those settlements with built-up area boundaries are shown on the Proposals Map and its Insets. Villages and smaller settlements which have no built-up area boundary will be treated for policy purposes as being within the countryside. The boundaries defined in this Local Plan are based on those already determined in the District's five predecessor Local Plans. These existing boundaries have been altered where a firmer boundary has been identified as a result of objections to the Local Plan and where new allocations are proposed.

Protection of the Countryside

- 3.23 The primary objective of this Local Plan with regard to the countryside is to secure its

protection by minimising the amount of land taken for development and preventing development which does not need to be there. At the same time it will seek to enhance the countryside, and support the rural economy by accommodating well-designed, appropriate new forms of development and changes in land use where a countryside location is required and where it does not adversely affect the rural environment. Where a countryside location is not essential, development will be directed towards the built-up areas. Development outside the built-up area boundaries will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances and where it does take place, the Council will exercise strict control over its siting and design.

C1 Outside built-up area boundaries, as detailed on the Proposals and Inset Maps, the remainder of the plan area is classified as a Countryside Area of Development Restraint where the countryside will be protected for its own sake. Proposals for development in the countryside, particularly that which would extend the built-up area boundaries beyond those shown will be firmly resisted and restricted to:

- (a) proposals reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture or forestry;
- (b) proposals for new uses in rural buildings of a scale consistent with the building's location;
- (c) in appropriate cases, proposals for the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste;
- (d) in appropriate cases, proposals for quiet informal recreation and/or tourism related developments;
- (e) proposals for facilities which are essential to meet the needs of local communities, and which cannot be accommodated satisfactorily within the built-up areas;
- (f) proposals for which a specific policy reference is made elsewhere in this Plan; and
- (g) proposals which significantly contribute to a sense of local identity and regional diversity.

3.24 One of the key functions of built-up area boundaries around settlements, as defined on the Proposals Map and its Insets, is to protect the adjoining countryside from unnecessary development. All proposals for development in the countryside will therefore be considered against the above policy. In certain locations, however, additional policies of protection are required. These are set out below.

Areas with Special Qualities

3.25 Those areas of countryside which have special qualities are the Strategic and Local Gaps, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land and Areas of Importance for Nature Conservation.

Strategic Gaps

- 3.26 The setting of towns and villages are as important as the buildings and spaces within them to their overall character. A clear visual break between settlements gives them a recognisable structure. If development was to occur in such areas it could lead to the coalescence of settlements and the loss of their individual identity and amenity. Retaining these gaps is, therefore, an important objective of both Local and Structure Plan policy.
- 3.27 Policy CH6 of the West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 - 2016 lists those gaps which are strategically important in the County. In this District seven such gaps have been identified. It is for the Local Plan, however, to define the precise boundaries.
- 3.28 The Secretary of State has previously made it clear that the purpose of strategic gaps is to prevent coalescence of settlements and to retain their separate identity and amenity and that, in order to achieve these objectives, their boundaries need not necessarily coincide with the boundaries of the built-up areas. A thorough review of every gap has been undertaken in preparing this plan. A Technical Report has been prepared which identifies the detailed assessment criteria and boundaries. The areas included within the strategic gaps are those which the Local Planning Authority considers should be generally kept free from development in the long term in order to secure the objectives of strategic gaps. Intervening villages which have built-up area boundaries are excluded from the strategic gaps, but the gaps between these villages themselves are vital components of the overall strategic gap. Hamlets or groups of buildings, where such boundaries have not been defined will be considered as part of the countryside within the gap.
- 3.29 Development proposals within the strategic gaps will be subject to the most rigorous examination because of the possible impact of such development on the objectives of strategic gaps. Strict control will be applied to ensure that the openness of the strategic gaps will not be compromised by the cumulative impact of such developments. Where possible the Local Planning Authority will seek opportunities to conserve and enhance the landscape and amenity of the strategic gaps.

C2 Strategic gaps have been defined and will be safeguarded between:

- Burgess Hill and Hurstpierpoint/Keymer/Hassocks;
- Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath;
- Haywards Heath and Cuckfield;
- Haywards Heath/Lindfield and Scaynes Hill;
- Crawley and East Grinstead;
- Crawley and Pease Pottage; and
- East Grinstead and Ashurst Wood

as defined on the Proposals Map and its Insets, with the objectives of preventing coalescence and retaining the separate identity and amenity of settlements.

Development will not be permitted within the strategic gap areas unless:

- (a) it is necessary for the purposes of agriculture, or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;
- (b) it makes a valuable contribution to the landscape and amenity of the gap and enhances its value as open countryside; and
- (c) it would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the gap.

Local Gaps

3.30 In addition to the strategic gaps, the District Council has identified other areas of countryside between towns and villages which are particularly vulnerable to development pressure, and the loss or erosion of which would have a harmful effect on the character of the rural areas and the amenity and setting of villages. The Local Plan designates these as local gaps, and, as in the case of strategic gaps, they are given specific policy protection in order to prevent coalescence and retain the separate identities and amenity of the settlements. Four such gaps and an area to the east of Burgess Hill (which warrants the same level of protection as these local gaps) have been identified in this District. The boundaries of the local countryside gaps mainly follow the built-up area boundaries of the adjacent settlements.

C3 Local Gaps have been defined and will be safeguarded between:

- West Hoathly and Sharpthorne;
- Hurstpierpoint, Albourne and Sayers Common;
- Keymer/Hassocks and Ditchling; and
- Keymer/Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint

as defined on the Proposals Map and its Insets with the objectives of preventing coalescence and retaining the separate identity and amenity of settlements.

In addition, the area which is within Mid Sussex between Burgess Hill and Ditchling Common is afforded the same status as a local gap in order to protect the local amenity and landscape importance of Ditchling Common.

Development will not be permitted within the local gap areas or the area between Burgess Hill and Ditchling Common unless:

- (a) it is necessary for the purposes of agriculture, or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;
- (b) it makes a valuable contribution to the landscape and amenity of the gap (or as in the case of the land between Burgess Hill and Ditchling Common) and enhances its value as open countryside; and
- (c) it would not compromise individually or cumulatively the objectives and fundamental integrity of the local gap.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

- 3.31 This is a valuable, finite resource where very firm restraint is required and where all development must pass the very strict test of "compelling circumstances". Due to the inter-relationship with the agricultural economy, this resource is discussed further in the section of this Chapter entitled 'Agriculture and the Rural Economy'.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

- 3.32 Over half of the area of the District lies within two AONBs, designated by the Countryside Agency in recognition of their nationally important landscape. Designation of the Sussex Downs AONB was confirmed in 1966 by the Secretary of State followed by the High Weald in 1983.
- 3.33 In the Plan area the character of the High Weald is contained in a pattern of distinctive ridged countryside and hedged fields, together with scattered shaws and larger blocks of woodland. Large areas remain quiet and unspoilt but are threatened by the cumulative impact of small scale development. The distinctiveness of the Sussex Downs AONB is characterised by chalk hills which dip gently to the south with a north facing escarpment which rears above the lowlands to the north comprising a mosaic of fields and woods. They offer both beauty and tranquillity and there are magnificent views both towards and away from them. This openness, however, makes this landscape especially sensitive to development pressures. The extent of both these areas, as defined by the Countryside Agency, is shown on the Proposals Map and its Insets.
- 3.34 The Countryside Commission states that:

"The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment."

"Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses."

Countryside Commission Policy Statement 1991

- 3.35 Government advice has re-emphasised the need to continue to protect the countryside for its own sake whilst having regard to the rural economy, reinforcing its general policies for conserving and safeguarding specially protected areas, including AONBs. (PPG7 and the Ministerial Statement in January 1991 endorsing the Countryside Commission's Policy Statement on AONBs).
- 3.36 'Statements of Intent' were published for the Sussex Downs AONB in 1986 and for the High Weald AONB, in revised form, in 1988. These are strategic statements, prepared jointly by the County Councils in consultation with the District Councils and other interested groups. These statements amplify the purpose and implications of the designation. Mid Sussex District Council has endorsed these documents and has thereby expressed a general willingness to accept the planning and land management implications of AONB designation.

- 3.37 A primary purpose of this Local Plan is to state explicitly the Council's policies relating to the control of development and for the exercise of other statutory powers within the AONBs. The special landscape qualities of these areas justifies extra vigilance in considering development proposals and their statutory designation strengthens the ability of the Council to protect them from inappropriate development. Landscape assessments which set out the distinctive character of the landscape of these areas, which is recognised in their designation, have now been prepared. Development will be expected to maintain or enhance the local distinctiveness of an area, as defined by the landscape assessments. A landscape assessment for the Sussex Downs AONB was published by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board in March 1995 and for the High Weald AONB by the Countryside Agency in November 1995. In addition, Landscape Design Guidelines for the Sussex Downs AONB were published by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board in 1997. West Sussex County Council has recently published Landscape Assessments covering not only the AONBs, but all areas of countryside within West Sussex.
- 3.38 Development proposals, in addition to meeting other policies in the Plan, will be subject to additional scrutiny to ensure that harm will not be caused to the visual quality and essential characteristics of the AONBs and that opportunities are taken for enhancement. The Council considers that every effort should be made to protect the AONBs from potentially obtrusive development, particularly on exposed sites which are visible from long distances. Design should, therefore, be of the highest standard to ensure the development contributes to or integrates with the established character in terms of siting, scale, design, choice of external materials and screening/landscaping. To achieve this there is a wide range of local materials/styles to choose from including stock bricks, plain clay tiles, tile hanging, dark stain weather boarding and Sussex hip rooves, but it is important that design reflects an understanding of the style being followed. This will require sufficient information to accompany the application to allow proper consideration of these matters. Even small scale proposals, including those for unsympathetic extensions which would be harmful to the qualities of the AONBs will be firmly resisted and in considering such proposals regard will be had to the potentially damaging cumulative effects.
- 3.39 In general, planning controls are more restrictive within AONBs than outside. For example, within the AONB the size of extensions to dwelling houses which may be made without the need for express planning permission ('Permitted Development') is less than outside the AONB. There are also additional restrictions for the construction of dormer windows and the application of cladding. Full details are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.
- 3.40 The following general policy will apply within the AONBs but also deals with immediately adjacent areas:

C4 Within the Sussex Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as shown on the Proposals Map and its Insets, the aim to conserve and enhance natural beauty is regarded as the overall priority. Proposals for development will be subject to the most rigorous examination and only those which comply with this aim will be permitted.

Development will not be permitted in the Sussex Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, unless:

- (a) it is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture or some other use which has to be located in the countryside;**

- (b) it is essential for local social and / or economic needs; or
- (c) it can be demonstrated that the development would be in the national interest and that no suitable sites are available elsewhere.

In considering development proposals within or immediately adjacent to the AONB, including those regarded as exceptions, particular attention will be paid to the siting, scale, design, external materials and screening of new buildings that are proposed in order to ensure that they enhance, and do not detract from, the visual quality and essential characteristics of the area.

Management of the AONBs

Sussex Downs

- 3.41 Following its Policy Statement on AONBs in 1991, the Countryside Agency and the 13 local authorities in the Sussex Downs AONB entered into an Agreement to establish the Sussex Downs Conservation Board to give a voice to the AONB and to provide leadership for practical action on the ground. Formed in April 1992 and with an agreement to run initially until 1998 the Board's role has been formally extended and has funding secured until March 2007 or until the date of the establishment of the South Downs National Park. The objectives of the Board are to protect, conserve and enhance the natural beauty and amenity of the Sussex Downs AONB including its physical, ecological and cultural landscape, to promote where appropriate its quiet informal enjoyment by the general public consistent with the first objective and promote sustainable forms of economic and social development which supports the other two objectives. The Board has taken over from the constituent local authorities many countryside and public access responsibilities, and is consulted on certain proposals for development in the AONB.
- 3.42 The key task of the Board has been to prepare a management plan to provide a framework on which to generate an integrated approach to the management of the AONB based on a strategic view of the whole area. A Management Strategy for the Sussex Downs was published in 1995 and revised in 1996. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 an Interim South Downs Management Plan was prepared in March 2004 in conjunction with East Hampshire AONB. The interim plan updated previous plans and provides a framework for organizations and individuals to work in partnership to conserve and enhance the area. The management plan will continue to evolve as new information becomes available. As a member of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board the Council has sought to influence the content of the Plan during the course of its preparation and will have regard to its contents when considering the suitability of proposals for development.
- 3.43 Part of the Sussex Downs AONB has also been designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In recognition of the importance of the landscape, historic and habitat value in such an area, farmers are encouraged, by means of payments, to practice traditional farming methods in order to protect or enhance environmental quality.

High Weald

- 3.44 In the case of the High Weald AONB, an advisory Forum comprising representatives of the constituent local authorities, national and regional bodies and amenity groups has been established to promote and co-ordinate the conservation of this distinctive area. The Council is a member, and is actively committed to its work. The first management plan for the High Weald was published in September 1995, to be reviewed after five years. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to produce a new management plan for their areas by March 2004. The District Council adopted the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 in January 2004. The Council will have regard to this Plan when considering the suitability of proposals for development in the High Weald AONB.

Areas of Importance for Nature Conservation

- 3.45 Wildlife habitats have come under increased pressure from development, changes in forestry and agricultural practices and increased recreational activity. Nevertheless the landscape of Mid Sussex still provides a rich diversity of natural habitats, which contain a variety of flora and fauna and which contribute to the abundance and diversity of British wildlife and its habitats. The Council is keen to assist in the preservation of wild plants and animals and to maintain and manage the diverse habitats upon which the wildlife depends. It is vital that steps are taken to prevent further destruction and deterioration of such habitats. This view is endorsed by Central Government in PPG9 (October 1994) and by West Sussex County Council in Policies CH1 and ERA2 of the Deposit Draft Structure Plan 2001 – 2016. In October 2001, the Council published a Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy for Mid Sussex entitled 'Our Green Heritage.' A key aspect of the implementation of the strategy is the preparation of planning guidance on landscape and biodiversity. In November 2003 the Council adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Landscape and Biodiversity. The guidance is intended to ensure that high quality development occurs in Mid Sussex, which enhances landscape and biodiversity and that the statutory and planning policy issues are being met.
- 3.46 The successful conservation of wildlife depends upon the retention of key sites and a supporting network of varying types and grades of habitats throughout the countryside and many urban areas.
- 3.47 Many important sites for nature conservation have been designated under statutes and international conventions. Within this District statutorily designated sites currently include sites of national and local importance. In considering the weight to be attached to nature conservation interests the District Council will have regard to the relative significance of designations.
- 3.48 **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)**, designated by English Nature, are the best examples of the nation's heritage of wildlife habitats, geological features and land forms. They are afforded special protection by legislation and Local Authorities are required to consult English Nature of any proposals considered likely to affect them. There are twelve SSSIs in this District which are shown on the Proposals and Inset Maps. Some SSSIs within Mid Sussex may in the period of this Plan be identified as being of international importance and designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under an EC directive. Once designated, regard will also be given to the significance of such areas.
- 3.49 **Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)** have been established by the District Council, in consultation with English Nature, where it is considered that a habitat of local significance makes a useful contribution both to nature conservation, as the principal function of the

site, and to education. Statutory declaration as a LNR places an obligation on the local authority to manage them in the interests of nature conservation. At the same time it increases the area's status and allows bylaws to be introduced. Within the District there are four LNRs as shown on the Proposals Map and its Insets.

- 3.50 **Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs).** A joint initiative by the County Council, English Nature and the Sussex Wildlife Trust (with support from District and Borough Councils, the Environment Agency and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature) resulted in the completion in 1992 of a detailed habitat survey identifying SNCIs in the County. SNCIs are non-statutorily designated sites and are identified on account of the special interest in their flora and/or fauna. They may include habitats, features or species of local, national or international importance. The assessment and identification of such sites is a continuing process. There are currently 51 SNCIs in Mid Sussex District which are identified on the Proposals Map and its Insets. Detailed maps of SNCIs have been published as a Technical Report (January 2004).

3.51 **Sites and Features important to Nature Conservation.**

Examples within the District include unimproved meadows, wildlife corridors and ancient woodland.

C5 Proposals for development or changes of use of management within Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, Local Nature Reserves, Ancient Woodlands or to other sites or areas identified as being of nature conservation or geological importance, including wildlife corridors will be subject to rigorous examination, and only permitted where the proposal, by virtue of design and layout, minimises the impact on features of nature conservation importance. Proposals should take advantage of opportunities for habitat creation wherever possible.

The weight to be attached to nature conservation interests will reflect the relative significance of designations. Special scrutiny will be applied to those sites which are statutorily designated.

Species Protection

- 3.52 There are certain species of plants and animals, such as bats, badgers and all wild birds, which are not necessarily confined to designated sites of nature conservation interest. Such species are protected by national and international legislation additional to that offered by the planning system. The possibility of any species being affected by development proposals will need to be borne in mind.
- 3.53 Where it is evident that a proposal could affect a species protected under national and international legislation, relevant conservation bodies will be consulted and a thorough site investigation will be required of the applicant. In addition, measures will be required to mitigate the impact of any proposed development on such protected species.

Biodiversity

- 3.54 The Local Planning Authority recognises the importance of the protection and

conservation of areas of importance for nature conservation and the valuable contribution made by these sites/features in conserving the biodiversity of our natural heritage, together with the opportunities for education and employment. As such it will seek their protection through firm policies of restraint on new development. The Council will also have regard to the contents of the 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan' produced by English Nature and the 'Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan', produced by Sussex Biodiversity Partnership.

- 3.55 The promotion and encouragement of sympathetic management of sites of nature conservation value will complement policies of firm restraint. Wildlife habitats may be damaged by land management practices beyond direct planning control (e.g. the grubbing up of hedgerows). In order to try to minimise the impact of such practices, the District Council, in conjunction with the County Council, will seek to influence land management by providing advice and by seeking agreements with landowners to protect habitats if they are at risk. It will seek to promote conservation measures, including the designation of LNRs and other sympathetic management measures such as woodland coppice which is an important feature in many woodlands. It will support similar measures by other bodies. On all District Council owned sites the Council will seek to ensure that land management practices take nature conservation fully into account. This is most important to enable nature conservation opportunities to be fully realised and to set an example to other landowners.
- 3.56 The District Council will promote nature conservation in the management of its own land by the production of management plans for important areas and by establishing ecological principles in landscape design, and will encourage other landowners to do likewise.

Trees, Hedgerows and Woodlands

- 3.57 There are extensive areas of woodland in the District, which together with numerous shaws, copses, tree belts and hedgerows make an important contribution to improving the landscape, to amenity, and to local climatic modification, as well as providing valuable habitats for wild plants and animals. There are remnants of ancient and semi-natural woodland throughout the area together with later extensive conifer plantations, including those managed by estates. The ancient broadleaved woodland of Sussex represents a substantial proportion of this habitat in Britain as a whole and is, therefore, important in the national context. The more recent tree plantations have included a greater amount of broadleaved species especially on their boundaries, and these are more in keeping with the traditional landscape of the District. This mixture of older woodland, which is mainly broadleaved, particularly oak and ash, but with a wide variety of other specimens together with the more recent conifer plantations gives rise to a range of colour, texture and seasonal interest throughout the District. There are many smaller areas of woodland which provide an attractive setting for the adjoining towns and which have amenity value.
- 3.58 The West Sussex Structure Plan Deposit Draft 2001 – 2016 recognises the importance of conserving and enhancing the quality and distinctive character of the landscape including the protection of woodlands and hedgerows which are important in the landscape and to wildlife conservation (Policies CH1, CH3 and ERA2). The District Council strongly supports this view, and because of the special importance of trees in the landscape, will encourage native broadleaved species to be used in tree planting and replanting schemes. In certain areas native 'Pinus Sylvestris' is an appropriate species for planting. Within AONBs reference should be made to the landscape assessments for these areas.

C6 Development resulting in the loss of woodlands, hedgerows and trees which are important in the landscape, or as natural habitats, or historically, will be resisted.

- 3.59 Encouragement will be given to the proper management of existing woodlands and hedgerows and to tree and hedgerow planting with appropriate species. Natural regeneration will be encouraged wherever appropriate. Tree Preservation Orders will be made where trees are at risk and are of visual importance in the landscape. Further reference to trees and development, particularly within built-up areas, is made in the Built Environment Chapter of this Local Plan.

Grant Schemes and Felling Licences

- 3.60 It is the District Council's desire to minimise the loss of trees and hedgerows through the Plan area and to encourage new tree planting initiatives. Grants for tree planting are available from various sources. The Woodland Grant Scheme was introduced in April 1988. It is intended to encourage the continued expansion of private forestry in a way which achieves a reasonable balance with the needs of the environment. The aims of the Scheme are to increase timber production and to promote the contribution which new woodlands can make to rural employment, to the provision of alternative uses of agricultural land no longer needed for food production and to the enhancement of landscape, recreation and wildlife conservation. It is also designed to encourage restocking and rehabilitation of existing woodlands either by planting or by natural regeneration. This scheme incorporates the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme operated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This is aimed at encouraging farmers to plant woodland rather than arable crops or maintaining grassland for livestock. The County Council gives advice and discretionary grants for small scale tree, shrub and hedge planting which use native species appropriate to the local area. The District Council will encourage landowners to take advantage of such grants where appropriate.
- 3.61 When consulted on applications for Felling Licences and Woodland Grant Schemes the Council will seek to ensure that when appropriate replanting and/or natural regeneration is a condition of the issue of the licence. Broadleaved woodland should be replanted with suitable broadleaved species unless natural regeneration is appropriate. In the case of conifer plantations, consideration should be given to replanting with broadleaved species, particularly in prominent locations or in those easily accessible to the public. When responding to consultations on applications for Felling Licences and Woodland Grant Schemes, the Council will have regard to the West Sussex County Council Landscape Assessment and Strategy which provides guidelines in respect of forestry plantations in the landscape.

Policies for Development in the Countryside

- 3.62 The following section of this chapter sets out policies for development within the countryside. Proposals for development in the countryside will also be considered against the policies for its protection set out in the first part of this chapter and, where relevant, against specific policies elsewhere in this Local Plan.

Agriculture and the Rural Economy

Background

- 3.63 Approximately two thirds of Mid Sussex District is in agricultural use and this has largely determined the undeveloped character of the landscape and its amenity and wildlife value.
- 3.64 The agricultural industry is, however, undergoing significant financial and structural changes across the whole country. Post-war agricultural policy has until recently sought to maximise farming productivity and to encourage food production. This policy has been successful to the extent that more food is being produced now than the market requires. Increasing surpluses together with technological improvements have reduced the need for land. Previously farmers have been sheltered from the economic consequences of overproduction by the EC Common Agricultural Policy. Fundamental changes to this policy, however, such as the introduction of quotas and the reduction in support prices have led to decreases in farm incomes which for some farmers have been substantial. As well as facing declining incomes the level of farm indebtedness has tended to increase. Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy has increased the pressure on farmers who will have to manage their resources with increasing efficiency.

Government Policy

- 3.65 Government policy towards agriculture has altered radically to reflect the changing situation. Whilst it is still an objective to safeguard the best and most versatile agricultural land, PPG7 states that the priority now is to promote diversification of the rural economy so as to provide wide and varied employment opportunities for rural people, including those previously employed in agriculture and related activities. Farmers are now being actively encouraged by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to take agricultural land out of production and to diversify into non-agricultural activities, provided that the new enterprise is not detrimental to the environment.
- 3.66 The Government also recognises that farmers are not only food producers but are custodians of the great majority of the countryside. It is encouraging farmers through a package of financial incentives, protective measures and guidance to manage their land in an environmentally sustainable way and to undertake environmental improvements. These include 'The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme' which provides annual payments to farmers who take land out of agricultural production and convert it to woodland and 'Countryside Stewardship' which is a grant scheme offering payments to farmers and other land managers for conservation of the countryside.

Local Plan Objectives for Agriculture

- 3.67 The Council shares this approach to the changing circumstances in the countryside and recognises the need to maintain a healthy rural economy. Changes to the rural economy should continue to be accommodated where these are consistent with the underlying objective of safeguarding the countryside. The District Council will therefore support the agricultural economy of the District by:
- 1) Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land.
 - 2) Permitting appropriate rural diversification schemes which provide employment opportunities, strengthen farm incomes and contribute positively to the wider

objectives of conserving and where possible, enhancing the countryside. Development arising from fragmentation, however, will be resisted.

- 3) Permitting the re-use and adaptation of suitable rural buildings for appropriate alternative uses.

The remainder of this section sets out the detailed policies to achieve the above objectives.

Protection of the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

~~3.68 Agricultural land is classified by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs into grades 1 to 5, grades 1, 2 and 3a land being the best and most versatile, with grades 3b, 4 and 5 of moderate to poor quality. The Government has stated in PPG7 that considerable weight should be given to protecting grade 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land from development because of its special importance in the national agricultural interest. It is a scarce resource for the future which should be safeguarded. Only 1.5% of agricultural land in the District is grade 1 or 2, well below average for West Sussex and England. The majority is grade 3 (60%) some of which will also fall within the best and most versatile category. There is some grade 4 land in the valleys. In view of the limited amount of grade 1 and 2 land in Mid Sussex it is considered to be just as important to protect grade 3a. Once agricultural land is developed, even to 'soft' uses such as golf courses, return to best quality agricultural use is seldom practicable. In assessing proposals for development in the countryside the Council will continue to take account of practical farming needs and will make every effort to avoid the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land or its fragmentation into unproductive units.~~

C7 ~~Only in compelling circumstances will development be permitted which would result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs agricultural land classification system).~~

~~For the purposes of this policy compelling circumstances will be judged to exist if the development is essential to the needs of agricultural or horticultural activities relying on the intrinsic quality of the soil, or for forestry.~~

Farm Fragmentation

3.69 The trend towards the fragmentation of farm units in the district has continued in recent years, with farms being split up and sold off in smaller lots without supporting buildings. There are 10% more holdings in the District than 10 years ago and this is attributable to the larger number of part-time holdings. The effect of this process is often to introduce a new range of activities such as horticultural nurseries and other intensive or quasi-agricultural uses. This may lead to pressure for a range of new buildings and structures provided they are necessary for the purposes of agriculture on the unit which could significantly change the open and undeveloped appearance of the landscape of the district, to the detriment of its overall character.

3.70 The effects on the landscape of farm fragmentation can be controlled further through the

use of Directions under Article 4(1) of the General Permitted Development Order, requiring specific planning approval for the erection of buildings, structures or fencing. These Directions are prepared by the District Council but must be submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for confirmation.

C8 The District Council will continue to use whatever means are at its disposal, and will seek the use of Article 4(1) Directions if appropriate, to minimise the potentially harmful effects on the character and appearance of the countryside in the Plan area, arising from changes in agricultural practice.

- 3.71 A further trend apparent over recent years is the increased use of agricultural land for horse and pony breeding. This use is normally associated with recreational activities and consequently does not fall within the definition of agriculture. As such a policy to control proposals for associated development has been included in the Recreation and Tourism Chapter of this Local Plan.
- 3.72 It is also increasingly common practice for peripheral agricultural land or other open land to be incorporated into residential curtilages. This often has the effect of changing the rural character of the locality, including the fringes of the built up areas, and will therefore be discouraged.

C9 Proposals involving the incorporation of agricultural land or other open land into residential curtilages will not be permitted where it is considered that such a change would result in a reduction in the character of the locality.

Agricultural Development

- 3.73 New agricultural buildings are often substantial structures which can have a considerable impact both individually and cumulatively on the appearance of the landscape and on groups of existing farm buildings. Whilst the Council seeks to limit the number of new buildings in the countryside it is recognised that there will be a continuing need for a range of new agricultural buildings, reflecting changing agricultural practices and restructuring in this sector of the economy. Under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 planning permission is granted for a wide range of developments associated with agricultural uses of land. The right to carry out such developments, however, cannot be exercised in most instances until the Council has been notified, providing it with the opportunity to determine whether prior approval will be required for the details of the proposals. Although this enables the Council to influence the siting, design and external appearance of some agricultural developments it is not open to the Council to consider the principle of whether the development should be permitted provided all the requirements of the Order are met. Not all development proposals notified to the District Council will, however, have such an impact that they will require prior approval. Policy H11 relates specifically to new agricultural workers' dwellings and is included within the Housing Chapter of this Local Plan.
- 3.74 In considering whether a development proposal on an agricultural unit of five hectares or more requires prior approval under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 the Council will have regard to :

- i) the impact of the siting, design and external appearance of the proposal on the landscape and its surroundings, including residential amenity.
- ii) the effects of the proposal on ancient monuments and their setting, known archaeological sites, listed buildings and their settings and areas of nature conservation importance.
- iii) the operational needs of the unit, where appropriate.

Where it is considered that a proposal is likely to have a significant impact in terms of the above criteria the formal submission of details for approval will be required.

- 3.75 Using these controls the Council will (through discussion and voluntary agreement if possible) seek to ensure that the changes that may be necessary to support agricultural businesses in the district are accommodated whilst protecting the character and appearance of the countryside.
- 3.76 In considering all agricultural development proposals particular regard will be paid to the detailed advice in PPG7, Annex E. New agricultural buildings should not be sited in prominent locations and should form part of a group rather than stand in isolation. Design, materials and colour should be compatible with other buildings, the rural setting, and be sympathetic to local traditions. This will be particularly important within the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the overall priority is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Whether or not planning permission is required, those intending to undertake developments associated with agricultural uses of land will be encouraged to hold prior discussions with the Council with regard to siting, design and materials.

C10 Where planning permission or prior notification of details is required, proposals related to agricultural, horticultural and forestry development will only be permitted where:

- (a) the proposal is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit;
- (b) its siting, design and materials are in keeping with the character and appearance of the landscape; and
- (c) it meets the requirements of other policies for the protection of the countryside, particularly those for areas with special qualities.

In addition, new glasshouses and other large scale buildings for agricultural or horticultural purposes will not be permitted where the development would:

- (d) have a detrimental impact on high quality landscape, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- (e) be unacceptably visually intrusive from roads, public rights of way or viewpoints; and
- (f) reduce the amenity of nearby housing.

The replacement of glasshouses on sites formerly occupied by

them will normally be permitted. Otherwise such sites will be treated no differently from other agricultural land in considering proposals.

- 3.77 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 gives the District Council control over new livestock units and associated structures such as slurry tanks and lagoons where these are close to certain existing buildings such as dwelling houses. The Council will use this control to protect the amenities of nearby residents and to secure wider countryside objectives.

C11 Livestock units and associated structures will only be permitted provided that:

- (a) the proposal would not have an adverse effect on the amenity of nearby residents;
- (b) the proposal is not on a prominent or exposed site conspicuous in the landscape from roads, public rights of way or view points;
- (c) there is adequate road access; and
- (d) the proposal meets the requirements of other policies including those for the protection of the countryside particularly where relating to areas with special qualities.

Rural Diversification

- 3.78 In response to the increasing efficiency of agricultural producers and changes in agricultural policy the Government is encouraging diversification of the rural economy into enterprises which can provide wide and varied employment opportunities for rural people including those formerly employed in agriculture. At the same time the Government recognises the need to protect the countryside for its own sake.
- 3.79 The environmental quality of the landscape within the District owes a great deal to the fact that it is farmed. Agricultural business will continue to play an important role in maintaining the quality of much of the countryside. Farm diversification is one means by which the rural economy can be sustained and the needs of the rural communities safeguarded. It can also reduce the tendency to fragment farm holdings.
- 3.80 Diversification schemes which may be appropriate include the development of tourist accommodation, recreation facilities, the processing and sale of local food products and the conversion of buildings for occupation by businesses provided that they are of a scale appropriate to the building's countryside setting. Some diversification projects will not require planning permission. Where a change of use of land or buildings is involved planning permission will be required. All planning proposals for diversification will be considered against the environmental policies of this plan together with the overall policy set out below and other specific policies where appropriate e.g. for recreational facilities, retail and employment uses.

C12 Proposals for the diversification of activities on existing farm units will be permitted if they:

- (a) are of a scale which is consistent to the location of the farm holding;
- (b) are, in terms of scale, nature and location commensurate with maintaining and where possible enhancing the character and appearance of the countryside;
- (c) are not contrary to policies for the protection of the countryside, particularly for those areas with special qualities and to those for the conversion of buildings in the countryside;
- (d) do not unreasonably affect the amenities of adjacent residents;
- (e) would not prejudice the agricultural use of a unit; and
- (f) would not generate a level of traffic which would result in substantial additional use of the local road network or which would prejudice highway safety.

- 3.81 Criterion (e) of the above policy reflects the fact that the Council wishes to ensure that diversification is regarded as a means of keeping any remaining parts of the holding in agricultural use, and is not treated simply as a way of disposing of all or part of the farm unit for other purposes leading to fragmentation of the holding. Applications should, therefore, be accompanied by sufficient supporting information. This may take the form of an overall 'farm plan' along the lines of the guidance leaflet produced by the Farm Diversification task group of the West Sussex Rural Strategy. This non-statutory document is available from the District Council. The District Council fully supports the use of Whole Farm Plans as a method of evaluating diversification potential and is an active member of the West Sussex Whole Farm Plan Network Group.
- 3.82 Individuals considering rural diversification schemes are encouraged to liaise with the District Council at the earliest opportunity to discuss the nature and implications of any proposals.

Re-use and Conversion of Rural Buildings

- 3.83 Government advice contained within PPG 7 is that the re-use of existing buildings, including modern buildings in rural areas, can assist the local economy, provide employment, and can reduce demands for development elsewhere, without necessarily adversely affecting the countryside. Buildings in the countryside which could be favourably considered for re-use or conversion include those which are in good condition, of sound and permanent construction and traditional rural buildings which form attractive features in the countryside. Many such buildings are listed. They should also be in keeping with their surroundings, in terms of form and activity, and unobtrusive in the landscape.

- 3.84 Proposals for the conversion of agricultural buildings, including those erected under permitted development rights, which have not been used or little used for their original purpose will not be permitted. This reflects Central Government advice in PPG 7 that it is important to discourage abuse of permitted development rights.
- 3.85 There is a wide range of potential new uses for rural buildings. Favourable consideration will be given to alternative uses such as commercial and industrial, recreational, tourist related, community and educational uses provided that they are of a scale which is appropriate to a countryside setting, can be accommodated within the existing building without the need for extensions and satisfy access and other environmental considerations.
- 3.86 Where there is evidence to suggest that the conversion of a rural building or buildings may harm roosting species such as bats and owls, the Council will consult appropriate bodies for specialist advice.
- 3.87 The conversion of rural buildings to residential use will, however, be strictly controlled as such conversions can fundamentally alter both the fabric of rural buildings, through the insertion of doors and windows, and their appearance in the landscape, through the creation of domestic gardens with manicured lawns, washing lines, etc. and garages. This is often unacceptable, particularly where it is important to retain the architectural integrity of a rural building or in the case of a group of buildings due to the cumulative impact of alterations or where it is in a location with special qualities particularly in the AONBs. In addition, after initial construction and sale, residential conversions tend to make only a minimal contribution to the local rural economy. Thus the Council will generally prefer a conversion to some other use as outlined above. For example, conversions for tourist accommodation tend to be less damaging to the landscape as garages and other features can be avoided, and they can also produce an ongoing income for a rural business. Such proposals are consequently to be preferred over permanent residential uses. A residential conversion may be considered appropriate in the case of a building which is listed or which makes a valuable contribution to the rural scene and its retention can be assured in no other way. Detailed guidance on converting rural buildings to alternative use is set out in the Council's Planning Information Leaflet PL10 "Rural Diversification"

C13 Permission will only be granted for the re-use or adaptation of rural buildings within Countryside Areas of Development Restraint subject to the following criteria:

- (a) **the building is of permanent construction and capable of re-use without substantial reconstruction or extensive alteration;**
- (b) **its bulk, form and general design is in keeping with its surroundings;**
- (c) **the type and level of activity proposed will not have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the locality or on the amenities of local residents or other countryside users;**
- (d) **works of adaptation to the building will be permitted only if they would not materially alter its appearance and setting. Where the building is listed particular care must be taken to**

preserve its historic integrity and character;

- (e) vehicular access and servicing arrangements are satisfactory;
- (f) business uses will be preferred (see (g) below in respect of residential use);
- (g) re-use for residential purposes will not normally be permitted. An exception may be made in the case of a listed building or one which makes a valuable contribution to the rural scene, where:
 - i) its retention cannot be assured in any other way;
 - ii) a business use is not appropriate on environmental grounds;
 - iii) the residential use is a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use; or
 - iv) it can be demonstrated that no viable business use can be secured for the building.

If permission is granted subsequent extensions will not normally be permitted and a condition removing permitted development rights may be applied. The District Council will pay particular regard to criterion (d) in its consideration of any such applications; and

- (h) proposals for the re-use of recently constructed agricultural buildings, including those erected under permitted development rights which have not been used or little used for their original purpose, will be refused.

- 3.88 As well as the smaller rural buildings subject to the above policy there are a number of large buildings including schools or country houses for example which already have or have had an urban type use and are now too large for their original purpose or are redundant. The following policy applies to development proposals for this type of building. Applications for extensions to rural buildings will be assessed against the background of the general policies for the countryside and policy C15 of this plan.

C14 Within Countryside Areas of Development Restraint permission may be granted for the re-use of institutional buildings or country houses no longer suitable for single family occupation only where the Council is satisfied that:

- (a) the retention of the building cannot be assured in its present use (or former use if vacant);
- (b) an institutional use will be preferred, although a business, hotel, leisure or residential use may be permitted subject to other policies in this plan;
- (c) the proposed development, including any alterations,

would not harm the character, appearance or setting of the property. This will be applied rigorously in cases where the buildings are of architectural or historic significance;

- (d) the new use would not lead to an unacceptable increase in traffic or other activity such as to harm the character and amenity of the locality or the amenities of local residents or other countryside users; and
- (e) satisfactory vehicular access and servicing arrangements are provided.

Where buildings are set in large grounds, the undeveloped part of the property should remain as open land. Permission will not be granted for the complete replacement of buildings or groups of buildings. Replacement of individual buildings within a group will be permitted only as part of a scheme for retaining and improving the greater part of the group, and new buildings will be restricted to the height and approximate floor area of those replaced.

- 3.89 The following policy applies to applications to extend a rural building which has been converted in accordance with policies C13 or C14 (or their predecessors) and which is in business use. It also applies to applications to extend institutional type uses in the countryside. As such buildings will, by definition, lie outside the built up area boundary countryside policies of development restraint will apply. The Council recognises, however, that there may be instances where exceptional circumstances justify the granting of a planning permission for the limited extension of such a building, despite the policy of restraint. Examples could include the need for additional accommodation in schools or nursing homes as a result of more stringent regulations or for the essential needs of an established rural business. It would not apply to proposals for additional, non-essential, demand led facilities or floorspace. In order to avoid problems associated with the cumulative impact of successive extensions such as increased built development and urban activity in the countryside, only those extensions which are of modest scale relative to the original building or as at 1948, will be permitted. It is important to note that this policy does not override the additional tests for development within specially designated areas such as AONBs or strategic gaps.

C15 Within Countryside Areas of Development Restraint limited extensions to institutional buildings or converted rural buildings in business use will only be permitted where:

- (a) it can be demonstrated that the extension is essential to the operation of the existing occupier;
- (b) the extension will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the locality, or on the amenities of local residents or other countryside users;
- (c) vehicular access and servicing arrangements are satisfactory and the proposal would not materially increase traffic movements to the site;

- (d) the extension is of modest scale relative to the original building (or as at 1948) and designed to be in keeping with its surroundings;
- (e) the development would comply with other policies in this Local Plan including those for the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and strategic gaps.

The Rural Economy

3.90 A number of companies of various sizes and types are located in the countryside and together make a significant contribution to the District's economy. Policies regarding business development in the countryside are considered in the Economy Chapter of this Local Plan.

Countryside Recreation and Tourism

3.91 The countryside is a valuable recreational and tourist resource and in appropriate circumstances can accommodate some new development related to these uses. Policies for recreation and tourism in the countryside, including horse related development and golf courses, are set out in the Recreation and Tourism Chapter of this Local Plan.

Shopping

3.92 Policies relating to proposals for retail developments in the countryside, including those for farm shops and garden centres, are contained in the Shopping Chapter of this Local Plan.

Advertisements

3.93 Most of the rural area of Mid Sussex was designated as an Area of Special Control of Advertisements in 1983. The boundaries were reviewed in 1992 when it was resolved that all land falling outside the built-up areas of the three main towns and the larger villages should be included. Designation as an Area of Special Control places additional restrictions on the amount of advertising which can be undertaken without the need for express consent. Large parts of the rural area are in any case subject to certain limitations on advertising by virtue of their designation as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Advertisements in the rural area are considered further in the Built Environment Chapter of this Local Plan.