

Rural Policies



3. RURAL AREA POLICIES

3.1 Development in Rural Areas

Policy RA.1 DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS

In rural areas, but outside the locations identified in Policy GD5, development, other than for minerals and waste, should be provided for in local plans specifically to meet the needs of the local population and to support rural communities. Development should be aimed at achieving a balance between enhancing and protecting rural life.

3.1.1 Policy RA.1 seeks to prevent development in rural areas other than that which specifically meets the needs of the rural population, rural businesses and agriculture. Development which does take place in rural areas should enhance the wider rural community by supporting local services and facilities without compromising the quality of rural life.

CONTEXT

3.1.2 Policy GD3 directs most of the additional housing and employment development to the nine main settlements in the Country, with populations between 8,000 and 75,000. Within the rural areas there should only be limited growth, and it will be for district/borough councils to decide, taking into account local community assessments, what growth should be provided for in the smaller rural settlements.

3.1.3 There is already a large housing land supply pipeline in rural areas, especially in Stratford on Avon District, and there is no evidence of a strategic need for further significant expansion of settlements in the rural areas outside the nine main towns. Although Policy RA.1 does not preclude growth in larger villages, it does relate growth or development to the needs of the existing local population. Where development in rural areas is unrelated to local needs, it would be likely to increase travel by car, and therefore conflict with sustainability objectives.

3.1.4 Modest growth in rural areas will be acceptable, where this is justified by local needs and in the context of community appraisals in the local plan process. This would satisfy the need to support communities and the rural externally-led development which might, through excessive scale, prejudice community life and the rural environment. This approach is also supported by The Countryside Agency in their document 'Towards

Tomorrow's Countryside' which promotes the view that 'our communities should have the opportunity to develop and grow to provide jobs and homes to meet local needs'.

3.1.5 In some circumstances the desire to maintain or increase the range and quality of local services or the vitality of the wider rural community may persuade the district/borough councils that growth to meet more than the immediate housing or employment needs of the local population is desirable and sustainable. Government Policy, in PPG7, recognises the need to improve the viability of existing villages and market towns' as a key element to the delivery of sustainable development.

3.1.6 There may be a case for some further sustainable growth in or associated with the smaller (i.e. less than 8000 population at 1991) market towns. They often remain nodes on the public transport network and are reasonably well served by public transport links to the larger towns. They have a wider range of services than the larger villages and have traditionally been centres for the rural hinterland. The Countryside Agency also share the view that 'market towns should be the basis of sustainable rural communities in the future' (Towards Tomorrow's

Countryside, p15). Furthermore, the Rural White Paper (p.73) encourages market towns to be considered as a focus for growth in areas which need regeneration, and more generally as service centres and hubs for the surrounding area, maximising their potential as attractive places to live, work and spend leisure time. Many market towns in Warwickshire are developing and adapting to new roles to maximise their potential, and they also have a key role as service centres serving the surrounding rural hinterland.

3.1.7 The scale and timing of the growth should be controlled to avoid overwhelming the distinctive character of the towns. The concept of balancing housing and industrial development in Policy RA.2 might be extended to cover a market town and its hinterland so that employment development in the market town is balanced by housing in the surrounding villages. Sustainable rural growth in transport corridors usually raises issues involving the competing claims of Green Belt objectives and accessibility. The protection of the distinctive character of the existing villages and the countryside are important considerations that need to be assessed carefully in the review of local plans by the district/borough councils.

OPERATION

3.1.8 This Policy sets the framework for new development in the rural areas of the County. Local plans should include policies for new development in rural

areas which meet the needs of the local population and support the wider rural community. In doing so, emphasis should be placed on achieving a balance between enhancing and protecting rural life.

3.2 Scale and Distribution of New Housing and Industrial Development

Policy RA.2 SCALE AND DISTRIBUTION OF NEW HOUSING AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The scale and distribution of new housing and industrial development in rural areas should be in balance and be complemented by the provision of local transport and other community facilities.

INTENT

3.2.1 Policy RA.2 intends to reduce the need to travel, to encourage the use of alternatives to the private car and to support rural services. It aims to seek a balance between new housing and industrial opportunities in rural areas so that people who work in rural areas have the opportunity to live close to their place of employment. Conversely, jobs must be provided for people living in rural areas to reduce distances travelled to get to work. The Policy also aims to ensure that improvements to local transport and community facilities are provided as part of, and proportionate to the scale of new rural development to provide the rural population with alternatives

to the private car and adequate services.

CONTEXT

3.2.2 Many parts of rural Warwickshire are in high demand for housing from commuters from the West Midlands Conurbation. This trend has been identified by The Countryside Agency who have recognised that south Warwickshire, in particular Stratford-on-Avon District, acts as a magnet for many moving from the metropolitan areas within the West Midlands, or from other locations further afield' ('The State of the Countryside 2000 - The West Midlands'). As a consequence, house prices in some rural areas have risen significantly and

local people have been unable to afford houses within their locality resulting in a distinct mismatch between housing and employment. The need to travel has increased due to both a rise in commuting from rural areas to the Conurbation and people employed in rural areas being forced to live away from the workplace, emphasising the need for sufficient provision of affordable housing to be made.

- 3.2.3 The Government aims to prevent the continuation of this trend through PPG7 which strives for more sustainable development in rural areas by reducing the need to travel. PPG7 aims to achieve this is by 'moving towards a better balance between housing and employment in rural communities'

OPERATION

- 3.2.4 Local plans should include policies to ensure that the scale and the

distribution of new housing and industrial development in rural areas is in balance. Furthermore, local plans should refer to Annex F6 on Transport and Development in the Local Transport Plan and should set out the requirement for improved or new community facilities stemming from any new development. Developer contributions will be sought and secured through Obligations, under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act, 1990, for such provision where appropriate, and this should be clearly set out in local plans. Policy RA.3 refers to new development in rural areas being planned, for those settlements within the settlement hierarchy, so that provision for all the necessary supporting infrastructure and services are secured. In addition, Policy T.3 specifically sets out that the County Council will seek developer contributions for various transport facilities and highway and traffic management schemes.



3.3 New Housing and Industrial Development in Rural Areas and Hierarchy of Settlements

Policy RA.3 HOUSING AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HIERARCHY OF SETTLEMENTS IN RURAL AREAS

Housing and industrial development in rural areas should:

- a) be planned in or adjacent to towns and villages;
- b) be related to a hierarchy of settlements as determined by local plans on a scale proportionate to job opportunities, and the availability of public transport and basic social facilities ie at least a school, shop and bus service;
- c) meet local needs as identified by the community in an appraisal or assessment set in the context of the local plan process; and
- d) be planned so that provision for all of the necessary supporting infrastructure and services are secured.

For settlements outside the hierarchy of settlements (ie those without basic facilities) growth levels should be determined by the community in an appraisal or assessment, set in the context of the local plan process

INTENT

3.3.1 Policy RA.3 requires that the bulk of development that takes place in rural areas (i.e. outside of the main towns) should be directed to those settlements which have the basic facilities necessary to provide a reasonable quality of life for all sectors of the community. The larger rural towns should take the majority of rural development as these settlements have a better range of shops, services, community facilities and public transport and have most scope for

sustainable growth. Further down the hierarchy of settlements the focus should be on those settlements which have at least a shop, school and a bus service.

3.3.2 This Policy also aims to ensure that new development in rural areas is in line with local need so that rural settlements do not cater for general housing and industrial need which would be better placed in the main towns rather than detracting from quality of life in rural areas. Allowing for local need also enables

settlements to expand to a size whereby key services can be sustained and such a capability will help to achieve the balance between jobs and homes as sought in Policy RA.2. All rural settlements, regardless of whether or not they fall within the hierarchy should have the ability to satisfy local needs as identified in a community appraisal or assessment as desired or necessary but limited by the local plan if this is considered appropriate.

- 3.3.3 This Policy also supports RA.2 by requiring all necessary supporting infrastructure and services to be secured as part of any development so that rural life is enhanced.

CONTEXT

- 3.3.4 Historically, development in Warwickshire has been less focused on the main towns and has taken place on very much a pro-rata basis with settlements generally receiving new housing and industry on a scale proportionate to their size. This has resulted in unsustainable patterns of growth as in many cases development has gone to locations which do not have basic facilities and services and has often detracted from the quality of life in these areas.

- 3.3.5 The Government is committed to focusing growth in existing settlements which contain a wide range of facilities and services to reduce the need to travel and to create balanced and inclusive communities. The Vital Village initiative and other initiatives are helping to secure and encourage the use of basic local services. The Government recognises that some development will need to go to rural areas but in order to satisfy sustainable development objectives the approach taken in PPG7 is that 'the main focus of new development should be on existing towns and villages'.

- 3.3.6 The involvement of the local community in identifying local needs by an appraisal or assessment set within the local plan review process is of great importance. The recent Rural White Paper also supports the approach of rural communities developing town and village plans setting out for example, how new development can best be fitted in and the facilities and services which the community needs to safeguard for the future; and refers to funding being available to assist 1,000 rural communities nationally to prepare their own town or village plan.

OPERATION

3.3.7 Local plans are required to set out a hierarchy of settlements reflecting employment opportunities, the availability of public transport and basic social facilities. It is anticipated that some smaller settlements will not fall within the hierarchy and within these settlements growth levels should be determined by the community in an appraisal or assessment, set within the local plan review process. For settlements within the hierarchy, local plans should set out the provision that needs to be made for new housing and industrial development that:

- meets local needs as identified with the wider rural community in an appraisal or assessment set within the local plan review process;
- is planned so that provision for all of the necessary supporting infrastructure and services are secured;
- is of a scale that reflects the position of the settlement in the hierarchy; and
- is located firstly, within, or then secondly, adjacent to the settlement.

3.4 Conversion of Existing Rural Buildings

Policy RA.4 CONVERSION OF EXISTING RURAL BUILDINGS.

Where appropriate to the location, local plans should give preference to the conversion of existing rural buildings for employment use.

INTENT

3.4.1 Policy RA.4 focuses mostly on buildings outside of towns and villages in the rural areas. It aims to prevent rural buildings being converted for uses other than employment through local plan policies. Such buildings are generally situated in open countryside and as they do not form part of an existing settlement they cannot be considered to be sustainable locations in which to locate new development, particularly housing, as all trips are likely to require the use of a

private car. Conversion for small business and employment purposes is likely to be one of the more sustainable re-uses for rural buildings which are worthy of retention and can facilitate the achievement of the balance between housing and industrial uses as sought in Policy RA.2. Rural buildings are often particularly suitable for conversion into small workshops and or employment uses which are most likely to provide employment for the indigenous rural population.

CONTEXT

3.4.2 Re-using rural buildings for housing and other non-business uses has exacerbated the current imbalance between housing and employment in rural areas as good potential employment sites and buildings have been lost to other uses. Landowners are often keen to re-use rural buildings for housing as they can fetch high prices which is particularly the case if existing uses are not highly profitable. However, across rural areas this can create a highly unsustainable pattern of development as it may not contribute positively to existing settlements, it may not meet local needs and it is likely to significantly increase the need to travel as almost all journeys require the use of the private car.

3.4.3 Government's advice set out in PPG7 is for 'strict control of houses in open countryside' and for development plans to include policies which 'do not allow residential re-use unless either: the applicant has made every reasonable attempt to secure suitable business re-use, and the application is supported by a statement of the efforts which have been made; or residential conversion is a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use'. This guidance is reflected in this Plan.

3.4.4 PPG7 places increased emphasis on local planning authorities being supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are consistent in their scale with their rural location. Furthermore, PPG13 (Transport) highlights that diversification of agricultural buildings is increasingly likely to lead to proposals for conversion or re-use of existing farm buildings for other business purposes, possibly in remote locations, and advises that local authorities should encourage farm diversification proposals particularly, but not exclusively, where this enables access by public transport, walking and cycling.

OPERATION

3.4.5 Local plans should set out a preference for employment use and local economic benefit when considering the conversion of existing rural buildings to other uses. The location of the rural buildings will need to be taken into account, and in some circumstances change of use to employment may not be appropriate, for example, if the transport infrastructure is inadequate, or it would damage the local environment.