

Chapter 8: Rural Area Policies

- 8.1 Warwick District's rural area is an important local asset, valued by those who live and work there and by the many that visit it. It is widely recognised that the attractiveness of the rural area needs to be protected. The countryside is also, however, under heavy development pressure, both from local people who genuinely need to diversify their activities or create new employment opportunities for local people, and from others choosing to live or work in the rural area.
- 8.2 The policies within this chapter of the Local Plan seek to balance these sometimes conflicting objectives by supporting the diversification of the rural economy whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing the character of the countryside.
- 8.3 These policies apply throughout the rural areas as defined on the Proposals Map. They should be read alongside other relevant policies that apply to parts of the rural area as indicated on the Proposals Map, including those for Green Belt (policy DAP1), and Areas of Restraint (DAP2).

Context

- 8.4 Over 90% of Warwick District's 28,226 hectares is rural, and some 15% of the District's population live there. Over 75% of the rural area lies within the West Midlands Green Belt and indeed nowhere within the District is more than 5 miles from a major urban area (either one of the District's own four towns, or the West Midlands conurbation).
- 8.5 Much of the rural area lies within an historic region of former wood pasture, ancient farmlands and dispersed settlements known as Arden, and large areas today have been classified as 'Special Landscape Areas'. There are five classified historic parks and gardens within the rural area. Large historic properties including Stoneleigh Abbey, Baddesley Clinton Hall, Wroxall Abbey and Packwood House once owned large estates of land within what is now the District and this influence is still seen in areas such as Stoneleigh Deer Park.
- 8.6 Today, the land is still extensively farmed however it is dissected by several major transport routes including the M40 motorway, the A46 and rail lines linking Birmingham and Coventry to Warwick, Leamington and London. The rural area contains a number of settlements of different sizes, the largest of which are Barford, Bishops Tachbrook, Hampton Magna, Lapworth and Radford Semele. Although many workers within the rural area commute to one of the surrounding towns and cities, there are a large number of institutions and employers of different sizes within the rural area. These include the Stoneleigh Business Park, Hatton Country World, Coventry Airport, the University of Warwick (the halls of residence for which lie within the District) and most importantly Stoneleigh Park (the National Agricultural Centre).
- 8.7 House prices throughout the District have risen sharply over recent years so that in smaller settlements, where housing choice is limited, it has become

increasingly difficult for local people to find suitable, affordable housing. Research by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies for the Regional Housing Partnership in July 2003 showed that the average sales price for non-detached properties in Warwick District was the highest in the region. Further, the income required to purchase a non-detached dwelling was £39,744, also the highest in the region. (See also Policy SC11 and paragraphs 5.51-5.65 and 5.68.)

- 8.8 It is important that a vibrant countryside is maintained for the benefit of those living, working and visiting there, but also equally that the countryside is protected from inappropriate development that would destroy its character and is not essential to meet local needs. The Core Strategy of this Plan, in accordance with the Structure Plan, seeks to direct most new development into the major towns of the District. Within the rural areas, development should only be provided specifically to meet the needs of the local population and to support rural communities including rural enterprises. Parish plans, appraisals and surveys, carried out by the local community, will be taken into account when considering the need for the development and the extent to which it supports a community.
- 8.9 The policies which follow, RAP1 to RAP16, set out the criteria whereby development will be permitted in the rural areas. In the case of agricultural development, which is intrinsic to the management and maintenance of the countryside, proposals will be considered with reference to other relevant policies of the Plan, in particular, Development Policies and Designated Areas Policies.

RAP1 Directing New Housing

Residential development will only be permitted in the following circumstances:-

- a) it is on previously developed land within the Limited Growth Villages of Barford, Bishops Tachbrook, Hampton Magna, Lapworth (Kingswood) and Radford Semele as defined on the Proposals Map where any market housing meets a specific local need as identified by the community in an appraisal or assessment;**
- b) it is affordable housing in accordance with Policy RAP4;**
- c) it is housing for rural workers in accordance with Policy RAP5;**
- d) it is the conversion or subdivision of appropriate rural buildings in accordance with RAP7 where all the following additional criteria are met:-**
 - I. the building is located within or adjacent to a village;**
 - II. the housing meets an identified local need; and**
 - III. outside of the Limited Growth Villages, the applicant can demonstrate that other uses (as identified by policies of this Plan) or a mixed use (where the residential element is subordinate to a business use) are not appropriate or viable.**
- e) it is a replacement dwelling in accordance with Policy RAP3.**

- 8.10 Approximately 15% of the population of Warwick District lives outside of the urban areas and the District has witnessed considerable pressure for new

- housing in recent years. New housing development in rural areas has an impact upon the character of the area, upon existing rural communities and upon wider objectives in terms of encouraging sustainable development.
- 8.11 Government policy directs new housing to the most sustainable locations and recognises that this will be mainly within urban areas. The Structure Plan directs most new development to urban areas and states that within rural areas this should be specifically to meet the needs of the local population and to support local communities.
- 8.12 The Council directs most new housing development into the main towns of the District through the application of policy UAP1. Outside of the main towns, residential development is more likely to result in greater levels of private car use due to the limited opportunities for walking/cycling and public transport use. The Council recognises that some of the larger villages can contribute towards sustainable patterns of development, particularly those which have a basic level of shops and services and frequent accessibility to the towns by public transport. It is only appropriate therefore that if new housing is required in the rural area it is directed into these more sustainable locations.
- 8.13 It is the case, however, that the rural areas have already seen more housing growth than is required throughout the whole of the Local Plan period to meet local needs as defined by the Structure Plan for open market housing. There is therefore no justification for permitting any additional housing within the rural areas unless it is specifically to meet the needs of the local population. Local housing needs may include affordable housing, housing for rural workers or market housing where the specific need has been identified in a parish plan, appraisal or assessment.
- 8.14 The role of the Local Plan, in accordance with guidance within the Structure Plan, is to determine the locations where any new housing within the rural areas should be directed and to ensure that this meets local needs. This policy seeks to do this by defining a hierarchy of settlements and by permitting within these only housing to meet local needs on appropriate land. Where the development is for market housing it should be provided for strictly in accordance with the policy and the Council will seek an element of affordable housing in accordance with Policy SC11.
- 8.15 The hierarchy of settlements has been determined with reference to the following criteria as set out in policy RA.3 of the Structure Plan. All the villages named in this policy contain, or have within reasonable walking distance:-
- a shop/general stores selling food and day-to-day household goods
 - a primary/junior school
 - a post office
 - a community building, e.g. public house, church, social club or village hall
 - an hourly daytime bus/train service to a major town
- 8.16 Development within the Limited Growth Villages will be permitted on previously developed land within the boundaries defined on the Proposals Map. It is

- acknowledged that services and facilities in the villages can change and that this may affect the list of settlements in the policy. The Council will regularly review rural services and facilities and will, if necessary, review the policy at an early date.
- 8.17 In all other rural settlements and in open countryside, residential development will not be permitted unless it is for affordable housing to meet a local need as defined by policy RAP4 or for rural workers dwellings as defined by policy RAP5.
- 8.18 Furthermore, in exceptional circumstances the conversion or subdivision of rural buildings for residential use may be permitted within, or adjacent to, villages. It is the Council's preference to see rural buildings converted to other suitable uses as outlined by other policies of this Plan. If it can be justified that all such uses are neither appropriate nor viable, the Council would then wish consideration to be given to a mixed use proposal in which the residential element is a subordinate part of a scheme for business re-use. Only if it can be demonstrated that this use is also neither appropriate nor viable will the Council consider proposals for a residential conversion. In making such a case, applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they have actively marketed the building(s) and explored all reasonable ways of finding a potential occupier. Furthermore, they should have explored all available grant funding that may be available for converting the property.
- 8.19 Where a residential conversion is acceptable, the Council will require applicants to demonstrate how the proposal will help to meet local needs in the area. Furthermore, the Council may require a contribution towards affordable housing in accordance with policy SC11.
- 8.20 This policy is applicable to all proposals which seek to create new residential dwelling units, including new build, redevelopments, subdivisions, intensifications and conversions. The policy needs to be read alongside all other policies in the Local Plan, particularly Development Policies and Sustainable Communities Policies.

RAP2 Extensions to Dwellings

Extensions to dwellings will be permitted unless they result in disproportionate additions to the original dwelling (excluding any detached buildings) which:-

- a) do not respect the character of the original dwelling by retaining its visual dominance;**
 - b) do not retain the openness of the rural area by significantly extending the visual impression of built development; or**
 - c) substantially alter the scale, design and character of the original dwelling.**
- 8.21 All development within rural areas should contribute to a sense of local identity and be of an appropriate design and scale for its location. Unsympathetic extensions to properties of a disproportional scale can have a serious impact upon local character. Government policy recognizes the need for a more stringent approach to extensions to dwellings in rural areas given the need to protect its landscape and character. The Structure Plan similarly emphasizes that

- any development that has an adverse impact upon the setting or character of a landscape or site should not normally be permitted.
- 8.22 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that extensions to dwellings do not have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding environment. The policy applies with equal measure within and outside of land designated as Green Belt.
- 8.23 The Council will assess all such proposals against the criteria listed within the policy, with particular regard to respecting the character of the original dwelling and retaining the openness of the rural area. Proposals which substantially alter the original dwelling will not be permitted. The original dwelling is defined as the dwelling granted permission if built since 1948. If the property was built prior to 1948, when modern planning legislation was first introduced, then it will be defined as what building stood at 1st July 1948.
- 8.24 It is not possible to define what is considered a disproportionate addition as this will be dependent upon various factors including:-
- the scale, design and character of the dwelling and any extensions,
 - the location of the property and its visual impact on the wider area and
 - the design and character of the extension proposed.
- 8.25 The Council will consider each case on its merits although as a guide, additions (taking into account any previous extensions permitted) which represent an increase of more than 40% to the gross floor space of the original dwelling (or 30% for dwellings within the Green Belt), excluding any detached buildings, are likely to be considered disproportionate.
- 8.26 In the case of barn conversions, the Council is extremely unlikely to grant approval for any extensions. Such conversions are only usually permitted where they can be undertaken with minimum disruption to the integrity of the original building. Any extension, however sensitively implemented, would harm this integrity.
- 8.27 In seeking to implement this policy, the Council will also have regard to other relevant policies of this Plan, notably DP1 (Layout and Design) and DP2 (Amenity).

RAP3 Replacement Dwellings

Proposals to replace existing dwellings will not be permitted unless the existing dwelling is:-

- a) structurally unsafe and beyond reasonable repair; or**
- b) of poor architectural design and does not add to the rural character of the area.**

Any replacement dwelling must not be materially larger than the existing dwelling and have no greater impact on the character and openness of the rural area. Permitted development rights for replacement dwellings may be removed.

- 8.28 As with proposals to extend existing dwellings, proposals for replacement dwellings should contribute to a sense of local identity and be of an appropriate design and scale for their location. National and local advice on development within rural areas applies equally to replacement dwellings.
- 8.29 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that replacement dwellings do not have an adverse impact on the surrounding environment. The policy applies with equal measure within and outside of land designated as Green Belt.
- 8.30 Where a replacement dwelling is sought, the applicant will be required to demonstrate the reason for replacement with qualified evidence as necessary. Where the principle of replacing the existing dwelling is accepted, proposals will be assessed against the criteria listed within the policy, together with those in policies DP1 (Layout & Design) and DP2 (Amenity). Particular regard will be had to retaining and enhancing the appearance and character of the rural area. In terms of scale, architectural form and materials, any replacement dwelling must not be more dominant than the existing dwelling within the landscape.
- 8.31 It should be noted that the Council in certain cases will remove permitted development rights for further ancillary residential accommodation.

RAP4 Providing Rural Affordable Housing

The development of affordable housing in the rural area to meet the local needs of a village or parish may be permitted in exceptional circumstances where:-

- a) there is full, detailed and up to date evidence, in the form of a parish or village survey of housing need, which demonstrates that the proposal will meet a particular local housing need which cannot be met in any other way;**
- b) the proposed development is small in scale, of appropriate design and is located within or adjoining an existing settlement; and**
- c) the following principles are established: -**
 - I. all of the housing provided will be for exclusive occupation of people with a demonstrable need to be housed in the locality;**
 - II. the type of accommodation to be provided will be determined on the basis of local need;**
 - III. forms of tenure other than social rented housing will be considered provided that they achieve weekly outgoings significantly below the maximum affordable to households in housing need; and**
 - IV. such housing is available, both initially and for subsequent occupancy, only to those with a demonstrable housing need.**

Outline planning applications will not be accepted for such proposals. Detailed permission will be valid for two years from the date of the decision and will expire if development has not commenced within this period.

- 8.32 It is widely recognised that there is a need within rural areas to provide affordable housing to meet local needs. This is important to sustain rural economies and allow those working in rural areas, together with those with strong family links to rural communities, to live there.

- 8.33 Government policy recognises this need and the difficulty in providing adequate land to meet this need. It allows local authorities, within certain guidelines, to permit housing in rural areas in locations that would not normally be released for housing. Such sites are released as an exception to normal planning policy, and as such are known as 'rural exceptions' sites. This general approach is also supported in the Structure Plan which seeks to ensure that in rural areas local plans should meet the needs of the local population and support rural communities.
- 8.34 The objective of this policy is to set out the circumstances under which the Council would permit the development of affordable housing to meet local needs. In view of the objectives within the Core Strategy to protect and enhance the natural environment, meet the housing needs of the whole community and support the diversification of the rural economy, it is important that an appropriate framework is in place to guide any decisions on 'rural exceptions' sites.
- 8.35 For these reasons, the criteria against which such proposals will be considered are necessarily strict. In all cases, the Council would strongly urge prospective applicants to engage in early discussions with both planning and housing officers before submitting proposals.
- 8.36 An essential element of any justification for allowing housing under this policy is a clear demonstration of housing need. A proposal will be expected to be accompanied by a local housing needs survey which identifies and justifies:-
- The area which it covers. This should normally be the parish within which the proposal is to be located, but may also include neighbouring parishes where relevant.
 - The type of housing need which is identified.
 - The clear reasons why those in housing need have a case to be housed in the local area.
- 8.37 The Council will seek to enter into a Section 106 planning agreement with the applicant to establish the principles of occupancy, tenure, housing type and availability in perpetuity. Accordingly, the proposal must demonstrate:-
- Why their housing needs cannot be met by any means other than building new homes?
 - How the properties will remain affordable for the benefit of people with a genuine local connection in perpetuity? In most cases, it is expected that the affordable housing provider will be a Registered Social Landlord or registered charitable trust.
 - How its location and design will relate well to the settlement which it is within or adjoins? For the purposes of this policy a settlement shall be defined as having at least one (but not necessarily all) of the basic services identified within policy RAP1. Where a proposal is made under this policy in locations which do not have any of these basic facilities, a very strong justification will be required for why affordable housing is appropriate in this location. In the case of the villages listed in policy RAP1, a proposal will be defined as adjoining if it abuts the village envelope identified on the Proposals Map. For

other settlements, proposals must abut one of the buildings which form part of the main settlement, not an isolated building which is not itself abutting the main village. Proposals in the open countryside will not be acceptable. In assessing the location and design of a proposal, full regard will be had to policies DP1 (Layout and Design) and DP2 (Amenity). In view of the sensitive location of proposals, only full applications will be accepted.

8.38 This policy covers all rural areas of the district. Within Green Belt areas however, particular controls need to apply to any proposals. Whilst the Government has recognised that rural housing granted under this policy may be appropriate in Green Belt areas, this should only happen exceptionally. Accordingly, the Council will seek proposals within the Green Belt to demonstrate the following:-

- That the proposal is consistent with the function of the Green Belt by not significantly undermining one of the objectives of Green Belt land as set out in PPG2 (paragraph 1.6) or subsequent guidance.
- That the people identified in the local needs assessment can demonstrate a strong local connection as evidenced by birth, long term residence, family connection (but only in the case of the elderly or those of failing health who need to live close to their family), or employment.

8.39 A key purpose of this policy is to provide affordable housing in rural areas to meet a need which was not identified at the outset of the local plan. Clearly these needs, and opportunities to meet them, will change over time. For this reason, where proposals are approved under this policy the Council will grant permission for two years only. If development has not commenced within the two year period, the approval will lapse and a fresh application will be required if the applicant wishes to develop the site.

RAP5 Housing for Rural Workers

Permanent residential development for rural workers will not be permitted unless:-

- a) there is a clear functional need for the person to be readily available on the site at most times;**
- b) the worker is fully or primarily employed on the land to which the proposal relates;**
- c) the unit and the agricultural activity is financially sound and has a clear prospect of remaining so;**
- d) the dwelling sought is of an appropriate size commensurate with the established functional requirement; and**
- e) the functional need could not be met by an existing dwelling on the unit, or by other existing accommodation in the area.**

8.40 Providing suitable homes for rural workers is one of the few circumstances where isolated residential development in the countryside may be acceptable. In view of the exceptional case which may be made in these cases, it is important that proper controls are placed upon this. Government guidance provides clear guidance for the tests that should be applied to any potential workers dwellings. In particular, these relate to two matters; the functional need for the dwelling, and

- the financial viability of the proposal. The objective of this policy is to provide the framework within which such proposals will be considered.
- 8.41 For the purposes of this policy, rural workers are defined as workers engaged full-time in farming, forestry or any other rural-based enterprise. The functional need for the dwelling can be determined if it is essential for the proper running of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available at most times, both during the day and at night. The financial viability can be established if the unit has been established for at least three years, has been profitable for at least one of them, is currently financially sound and has a clear prospect of remaining so. The Council may wish to see financial information to support any such claim as part of an application.
- 8.42 Dwellings proposed under this policy will be expected to be of a size commensurate with the function of the farm. It is the requirement of the enterprise rather than the owner that is relevant to determining whether the size of a proposed dwelling is appropriate. The gross maximum permitted size for such a dwelling, including garaging, will normally be 140 square metres (1,500 square feet) in area.
- 8.43 Where a dwelling is granted under this policy, an appropriate condition (or legal agreement) restricting occupancy will be required to ensure that the dwelling remains for the purpose for which it was built and that a functional relationship exists between the unit and the land with which it is associated.
- 8.44 In recent times, the Council has received enquiries from horticultural or equestrian enterprises for workers dwellings. In dealing with such applications, the above principles will be applied particularly carefully given the different nature of these operations. Horticultural and equestrian activities are often intensive activities taking place on smaller areas of land than a normal farm holding, and in many cases can change relatively easily to other, less intensive forms of activity (which may not, of themselves, then require a workers dwelling). In many cases therefore, the granting of a temporary consent for a mobile home may be more appropriate. The granting of any workers dwelling solely on the grounds of providing security for crops or livestock will not be permitted.

RAP6 Directing New Employment

New employment development will be permitted in the following circumstances:-

- a) conversions or replacement of appropriate rural buildings in accordance with policy RAP7 or RAP8 where these are of a small scale or a low intensity, or can be demonstrated to meet a local need;**
- b) farm diversification proposals in accordance with policy RAP9;**
- c) proposals on identified major developed sites within the Green Belt in accordance with policy SSP2;**
- d) on previously-developed land within a limited growth village where this can be demonstrated to meet a local need;**
- e) the redevelopment or limited expansion of existing employment sites outside the Green Belt unless the scale of this will be greater than that required to meet local needs; and**

f) on committed employment land within the Middlemarch Business Park, Siskin Drive.

- 8.45 Warwick District's rural area contains a number of existing employment areas of differing types. Furthermore, over recent years, the District has seen pressure as a growing number of new businesses have sought to locate within the rural area. This has come from landowners seeking to re-use existing redundant buildings, farmers wishing to diversify their activities and existing businesses seeking to change or expand their activities.
- 8.46 In supporting a diverse rural economy, it is important that a balance is reached between the needs and aspirations of people wishing to invest in the rural area, the need to foster sustainable patterns of development and the need to protect the character and quality of the countryside. A factor here is the proximity of all rural areas within the District to nearby towns and cities. It is important that the Local Plan allows appropriate rural enterprises to flourish and meet local needs, whilst protecting the countryside from development and uses which should properly be channelled into urban areas.
- 8.47 Government policy recognises the expanding range of industries that can be successfully located in rural areas and encourages development plans to make appropriate provision. In doing so, planning authorities should set parameters for this, both in terms of the location of new development, and the circumstances when existing buildings should be re-used. This is particularly important within Green Belt areas. The Structure Plan requires that development in rural areas should be specifically to meet the needs of local people and to support rural communities.
- 8.48 This policy provides a framework for a range of different situations where additional employment floorspace may be sought. With regard to the conversion, re-use or replacement of rural buildings, the Council's preference is to see an employment (Use Class B1, B2 or B8) re-use of appropriate buildings. It is recognised that not all locations may be appropriate (for example where a warehousing proposal would cause an increase in heavy goods vehicles on unsuitable roads) or that the nature of works required converting the building to an employment use would raise particular planning objections.
- 8.49 Furthermore, proposals should be of a small scale or a low intensity such that they would not lead to a dispersal of activity that may prejudice Local Transport Plan and Structure Plan objectives for reducing reliance on the private car and thereby compromise sustainability objectives. Major proposals for the re-use of very substantial rural buildings or groups of buildings may have a large aggregate floor area. This may lead to a dispersal of activity that may prejudice the vitality of nearby towns and the re-use of previously developed sites within them, or may cause an increase of vehicle movements in less sustainable locations.
- 8.50 There applicants seek to justify proposals with reference to meeting local employment needs, they may be required to demonstrate that the use will support local communities and achieve a balance between enhancing and protecting rural life. Where proposals are received to create new employment

uses within the limited growth villages, particular care will be needed to ensure that the character and amenity of the village is protected.

- 8.51 Proposals to redevelop or expand existing rural employment areas need to be carefully controlled. Policy SC2 resists the loss of current employment land across the district. Policy RAP6 underlines the distinction between employment sites within and outside the Green Belt. Outside of the Green Belt, the redevelopment or intensification of existing areas within their curtilage will be supported unless the scale of this will be greater than that required to meet local needs and to support rural communities. Proposals to expand existing employment premises will be assessed by the extent to which they seek to expand the scale of the present operation, or are simply to modernize or rationalize the existing business.
- 8.52 Within Green Belt areas and outside of “major developed sites” (see policy DAP1 and SSP2), all development on existing employment sites is inappropriate in accordance with PPG2. In considering proposals the Council will, however, have regard to the scale, appearance and nature of the employment activity and the extent to which the proposal would support Green Belt objectives in the area.
- 8.53 In accordance with policy DP7, Travel Plans will be required on all relevant proposals for employment uses in rural areas.

RAP7 Converting Rural Buildings

Proposals to re-use and adapt existing rural buildings will be permitted subject to the following criteria:-

- a) the building is of permanent and substantial construction;**
 - b) the condition of the building, its nature and situation, makes it suitable for re-use or adaptation;**
 - c) the proposed use or adaptation can be accommodated without extensive rebuilding or alteration to the external appearance of the building;**
 - d) the proposal retains and respects the special qualities and features of listed and other traditional rural buildings,**
 - e) the appearance and setting of the building following conversion protects, and where possible enhances, the character and appearance of the countryside; and**
 - f) the proposed use or adaptation would not give rise to legitimate planning objections which would otherwise outweigh the benefits of re-use or adaptation.**
- 8.54 The Council receives a considerable number of applications every year to convert existing rural buildings. It is keen to support measures that bring vacant or redundant buildings back into productive use, subject to the nature, scale, form and location of the building and the proposed use.
- 8.55 Government advice supports the appropriate re-use of rural buildings, particularly where this can help meet the needs of rural areas for commercial and industrial development as well as for tourism, sport and recreation. There is less support for residential conversions that have a minimal impact upon stimulating the

- economy of rural areas. The Structure Plan gives local plans a clear direction that in appropriate locations, there should be a preference for conversions to employment use.
- 8.56 Other policies within this chapter of the Plan deal with the uses to which rural buildings may be put. These are RAP1 (housing), RAP6 (employment), RAP9 (farm diversification), RAP11 (shops), RAP12 (farm shops), RAP13 (leisure uses) and RAP15 and 16 (tourism uses).
- 8.57 This policy provides a framework to ensure that any conversions are carried out in an appropriate manner. It applies equally to all rural buildings for which a new use or adaptation is sought, including existing properties and buildings within villages. The Council will examine all proposals carefully against both this policy, and other relevant policies, in particular DP1 (Layout & Design) and DP2 (Amenity). In determining whether a building is of permanent and substantial construction and its condition makes it suitable for change, the Council will require evidence, substantiated by a structural engineer's report, that the stability of the building is adequate.
- 8.58 Where legitimate planning objections are raised to a proposal (for example on environmental or traffic grounds), the Council will only be satisfied where a suitable and enforceable planning condition can be imposed or a planning obligation agreed which meets the objection. Where proposals include extending rural buildings as part of their conversion, these will not be approved unless it can be demonstrated that the extension is essential for the retention of the building.
- 8.59 A significant number of rural buildings are listed as being of special architectural or historical interest. Any works required to these buildings must preserve the original structure, features, character and special qualities of the building both internally and externally and retain the setting of the building in the landscape.
- 8.60 Policy DAP3 gives protection to protected and other wildlife species. Rural buildings may contain bats and barn owls. Bats are protected under European and British law. Applicants are advised to check for the presence of bats and barn owls and seek professional advice to ensure that their proposals safeguard these species using the site.

Policy RAP8 Replacement of Rural Buildings

The replacement of existing rural buildings will be considered favourably for employment or farm diversification proposals provided that:

- a) the building to be replaced is of permanent and substantial construction;
- b) it can be demonstrated that replacement is preferable to conversion in terms of the appearance of the existing building and its suitability for the proposed use;
- c) the replacement building is not materially larger than the building it replaces, is of a design and scale appropriate to its rural location and has no greater impact on the character and openness of the rural area; and
- d) the replacement would not result in the loss of a building which displays the special qualities of a traditional rural building.

Employment proposals should accord with Policy RAP6 and farm diversification proposals should accord with Policy RAP9. The replacement of rural buildings will not be appropriate development within the Green Belt.

8.61 The Council favours the re-use of existing rural buildings wherever possible since they are often of a scale and design which complement their rural surroundings. However there may be circumstances where a rural building is of poor quality in terms of design and its effect on the surrounding area and it may not easily lend itself to re-use. Where such buildings are the subject of proposals for new employment development or farm diversification proposals, which satisfy the criteria in Policy RAP6 or RAP9, it may be more appropriate to replace the building. Consideration will be given to such proposals where it is demonstrated that replacement is preferable to re-use.

8.62 Where the replacement of the building is considered to be the favourable option, the new building should be of a scale and design appropriate to a rural location and should not be materially larger than the building which it replaces. This will ensure that the character of the rural area is retained or enhanced. Such proposals, however, will not be permitted in the Green Belt, except in very special circumstances, because only the replacement of existing dwellings is appropriate development.

RAP9 Farm Diversification

Development for the diversification of farm based operations will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it will contribute towards sustaining the long term operation and viability of the existing farm holding. All proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:-

- a) they protect best and most versatile agricultural land;
- b) proposals to convert or replace rural buildings comply with policy RAP7 or RAP8;
- c) the scale and nature of the proposals is appropriate to their rural location such that they can be satisfactorily integrated into the landscape without being detrimental to its character; and
- d) existing buildings cannot be utilised in preference to new buildings.

No new buildings will be permitted in the Green Belt except in very special circumstances.

- 8.63 Farming makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, however increasingly diversification into non-agricultural activities is becoming vital to the continuing viability of many farm businesses. Farming makes a significant contribution to the rural economy but increasingly diversification into non-agricultural activities is becoming vital to the continuing viability of many farm businesses.
- 8.64 Farm diversification can take on a wide range of forms. It is important that a framework exists to consider the range of proposals that are now coming forward. This is the purpose of this policy.
- 8.65 The twin objectives of farm diversification are to promote activities that are sustainable and appropriate within the countryside and at the same time help protect the long-term future of the farm holding. In terms of the first objective, proposals must be consistent in their scale and nature with their rural location. Proposals that lead to unsustainable patterns of development will not be accepted. This may lead to a dispersal of activity that may prejudice the vitality of nearby towns and the re-use of brown field sites within them, or may cause an increase of vehicle movements in less sustainable locations.
- 8.66 In terms of the second objective, there is little benefit in supporting schemes that are primarily about disposing of farm assets. For this reason, an applicant will need to demonstrate how proposals help support the operation of the existing farm holding. The Council may seek, in appropriate cases, a planning obligation (in the form of a section 106 agreement) to tie a building or piece of land that is to be the subject of the diversification activity to the rest of the farm holding. The purpose of this would be to prevent the subsequent fragmentation of the agricultural unit.
- 8.67 All proposals must be able to demonstrate how they protect the character of the countryside, visually (the impact of new buildings and activities on the landscape), functionally (the impact of noise and traffic) and environmentally (the protection of “best and most versatile” agricultural land). The Council will have regard to all other relevant policies of this plan when considering diversification proposals including DP1 (Layout and Design), DP2 (Amenity), DP3 (Natural Environment), DP6 (Access), DP7 (Traffic Generation), DAP1 (Green Belt), RAP7 (Converting Rural Buildings) and RAP8 (Replacement of Rural Buildings). In considering proposals, regard will be had to the cumulative affect of proposed activities at the farm holding on the character of the local area. Within Green Belt areas, any new building will be considered inappropriate development.

RAP10 Safeguarding Rural Roads

Development will not be permitted that would require major modification to surrounding rural roads in a way that would change the character of rural roads in the vicinity of the proposal.

- 8.68 The scale and nature of any development within the rural area should be appropriate to its location. The rural area within Warwick District contains many minor rural roads, and it is important that in permitting new development, their character is protected. Development that would change this character is, by definition, likely to be of an inappropriate scale.
- 8.69 Policy DP6 requires development proposals to demonstrate that they do not cause any harm to highway safety. This policy further requires that in rural areas development does not result in unacceptable levels of traffic generation on local roads in a manner that would cause detriment to the character of rural roads in the vicinity of the proposal. In appropriate cases, applicants will be required to undertake transport assessments to assess levels of traffic generation in accordance with policy DP7.

RAP11 Rural Shops and Services

The development of new or expansion of existing shops and local services within settlements will be permitted where these meet local retail or service needs. Proposals that result in the loss of such units to other uses will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:-

- a) the unit is no longer financially viable;**
 - b) the unit has been actively marketed for a period of 12 months without success; and**
 - c) all reasonable other options to find a new user for the unit have been pursued.**
- 8.70 The District possesses a significant number of shops and other local services in its villages. These perform an important role meeting the daily needs of people and it is important that such facilities are not lost. This approach is strongly supported by Government policy that urges local authorities to adopt a positive approach to proposals to convert or extend shops where this would help maintain their viability.
- 8.71 The Council will sympathetically consider proposals for new shops, pubs and post offices within settlements provided it can be shown that the use is clearly seeking to meet a local need. For the purpose of this policy, shops include both stand-alone premises and those that are associated with petrol stations, pubs and farms. A settlement can be of any size, however, proposals will need to demonstrate that they are serving a local need (usually the immediate requirements of the settlement) and this will be more difficult in the case of facilities within very small communities. Proposals for new retail and service facilities in open countryside will not be supported, except in the case of farm shops (see policy RAP12 below).

- 8.72 Where applications propose the loss of village shops or other facilities, the Council will require applicants to produce evidence to substantiate the lack of viability of the use. This may include access to the financial records of the business in appropriate circumstances.

RAP12 Farm Shops

Development of new farm shops and the extension of existing farm shops will be permitted where:-

- a) the proposal involves the conversion of an appropriate rural building in accordance with policy RAP7 or the construction of a new building in accordance with RAP9; and**
- b) it would not have an adverse impact on existing rural shops in the local area.**

A condition will be applied to any permission to control the proportion of goods to be sold which is not produced locally to a maximum of 25%.

- 8.73 Over the years, growers have set up shops on their land to sell produce direct to the public. These outlets can be a means of assisting the commercial success of farming operations. The Government supports the role of farm shops where these can help meet the demand for fresh produce and provide a source of local jobs. The Council similarly supports farm shops where these can assist in farm diversification projects, offer an outlet for food produced on the farm and support the local economy. It is important however that farm shops are controlled so that they remain a venue to buy locally produced food and do not grow to an inappropriate scale which would undermine shops and services in local villages.
- 8.74 In most cases, farm shops will be created by converting existing buildings in accordance with policy RAP7. Where a new building is sought, this may only be done in accordance with policy RAP9 as part of a farm diversification proposal. In either event, it will be vital that the appearance of the countryside is protected and that the safety and character of local roads is not affected.
- 8.75 Farm based shops should sell mainly locally produced foodstuffs and products. The sale of a wider range of goods would require more substantial premises, often out of character in a rural area, and generating considerable traffic and activity. Retailing of this nature, not related primarily to the sale of goods grown or produced locally, should be directed to the existing town centres.

RAP13 Directing New Outdoor Sport and Recreation Development

Development of outdoor leisure and recreation facilities will only be permitted where:-

- a) major outdoor leisure and recreation developments demonstrate that the use cannot operate effectively in an urban location and that the location is, or can be made to be, highly accessible to the urban area by walking, cycling and public transport; or**

- b) small scale outdoor leisure and recreation developments within or adjacent to settlements meet the needs of local communities.**
- c) Proposals for such uses in open countryside will only be acceptable where they are part of farm diversification proposals in accordance with policy RAP9 or where there are no other sites available to meet the need identified in criterion b).**

Furthermore, all proposals must be in accordance with the following criteria:-

- I. they do not result in the irreversible loss of best and most versatile farm land; and**
- II. any buildings must be essential and ancillary to the use of the land. The conversion of appropriate rural buildings will be permitted subject to policy RAP7. New buildings will only be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that existing buildings cannot be utilised in preference and where they are of a design and scale appropriate to a rural area.**

- 8.76 In view of the large number of people living within easy travelling distance of the rural area, there is considerable pressure for new outdoor leisure and recreational uses. This is particularly the case in urban fringe areas but also in other areas as farmers seek to diversify their activities. Government policy requires that proper controls are exercised over such uses in rural areas, whilst recognising the potential for urban fringe areas to play a positive role in providing leisure and recreation facilities to meet the needs of the wider community.
- 8.77 The purpose of this policy is to direct major outdoor leisure and recreation uses to locations which will help promote social inclusion and reduce reliance on the private car, and to ensure that all proposals are appropriate in their layout, design and scale to their rural location.
- 8.78 In considering any proposals for leisure and recreation developments, the impact of the development upon the countryside will be of paramount importance. Where new buildings are required to enable the activity to take place, these must be the minimum required for the activity and essential for its operation. This applies in all rural locations, however Government guidance gives particular advice for within Green Belt areas. Within the Green Belt, any development that is deemed non-essential (e.g. additional function rooms) will be deemed inappropriate development. In all cases, and subject to policy RAP7, the Council would wish to see existing buildings re-used or converted before new buildings are built.
- 8.79 The appearance of overall leisure or recreation use upon the character of the countryside will also be considered. In considering policy DP1, the cumulative impact of the use must be such that it can be integrated into the open countryside without compromising its rural character.
- 8.80 Major leisure and recreation uses can be defined as those uses which are likely to attract significant numbers of participants or spectators. These uses are supported in principle provided that it can be demonstrated the use could not be accommodated within the urban area. Furthermore, such uses should be directed towards locations within the urban fringe, i.e. sites that adjoin or are

- adjacent to the urban area. Such proposals will need to demonstrate that they are easily accessible for pedestrians and cyclists and are adjacent to public transport services.
- 8.81 Small scale leisure and recreation uses which do not generate significant numbers of participants or spectators may be acceptable in principle elsewhere where they are of a scale and nature appropriate to their rural location. These may comprise facilities within or adjacent to settlements that meet the needs of local communities. Alternatively, they may form part of farm diversification projects in which case they will be considered against policy RAP9. In such cases, the Council may seek a planning obligation to tie the land that is required for the leisure or recreation use to the rest of the farm holding.
- 8.82 Small scale mooring facilities are likely to be appropriate in the rural area. However, large scale marinas with associated buildings are more likely to be appropriate in urban areas.
- 8.83 Applicants are strongly advised to consult with the Council, prior to making a planning application, in order to determine whether the use proposed is defined as major or small scale.
- 8.84 In cases where the applicant is required to provide evidence to demonstrate local need, this will be done either through a village appraisal using criteria agreed in advance with the Council or through the outcome of the Open Space Audit the Council has undertaken (in accordance with SC5).

RAP14 Golf Facilities

Development of facilities for golf will not be permitted unless there is convincing evidence of the need for the proposal.

- 8.85 The Council is particularly concerned about new golf courses due to the amount of land required and the potential impact on the landscape and natural habitats. It therefore only supports the development of golf courses and facilities in appropriate locations which meet an identified need. Applicants will need to demonstrate need having regard to the supply of existing facilities, demand based on participation rates and an analysis of the catchment areas of existing facilities in accordance with the strategies of Sport England and the governing bodies for golf. In most instances the Council would expect this to be demonstrated through the submission of a business plan to ensure the long term viability of the scheme. Proposals will also need to comply with Policy RAP13 and be accessible by public transport. Careful consideration will also be given to the environmental impact of the proposals, particularly in relation to landscape impact. The Council will require applicants to demonstrate that the environment has been protected and where possible enhanced.

RAP15 Camping and Caravanning Sites

Camping and caravanning sites will not be permitted unless they can be satisfactorily integrated into the landscape without detriment to its character, are in a location accessible to local facilities, and are not in areas of high flood risk.

Any buildings required must be essential and ancillary to the use of the land. The conversion of appropriate rural buildings will be permitted subject to policy RAP7. New buildings may be acceptable outside of the Green Belt where it can be demonstrated that existing buildings cannot be utilised in preference and where they are of a design and scale appropriate to a rural area.

- 8.86 With a combination of its attractive countryside and major visitor attractions both within its District and nearby, the rural area will continue to see pressure for tourist and related uses. The Structure Plan supports new tourist developments where this will provide jobs and community benefits and where it can maximise alternatives to the private car, have easy access to the main urban areas and not undermine the value of natural or cultural assets.
- 8.87 Camping and caravan sites can provide useful low cost accommodation, however they can seriously harm the landscape if they are insensitively located or become too large. Within the District this is particularly important within the Special Landscape Areas where the open character of the landscape is the very reason for their designation.
- 8.88 All proposals will be expected to be unobtrusive within the landscape and be in keeping with the character of the rural area. The scale of the proposals will be an important factor here as often small sites can be assimilated into the landscape more easily than larger sites. New buildings may be supported outside of Green Belt areas, however in all instances the opportunities for conversion must be explored before a new building is considered. Within Green Belt areas, any new building will be considered inappropriate development.
- 8.89 Caravanning, camping and other temporary occupancy sites also give rise to special problems in relation to flooding. The instability of caravans places occupants at special risk and it may be difficult to operate an effective flood warning system. In accordance with PPG25, the development of these facilities will not be permitted in areas of high flood risk. In other flood risk areas applicants will need to prepare a flood warning and evacuation plan.

RAP16 Directing New Visitor Accommodation

Development of new buildings for visitor accommodation will not be permitted. The conversion of appropriate rural buildings will be permitted in accordance with policy RAP7 where they are of a small scale or a low intensity and would not harm the character of the rural area.

Extensions to existing visitor accommodation will only be permitted where these do not significantly intensify the use of the site or establish new uses which are not ancillary to the normal business of the visitor accommodation.

- 8.90 As a general principle, new visitor accommodation (including new hotels and guest houses within Use Class C1) should be properly directed towards urban areas, and proposals to build new hotels in the rural area will be resisted. The conversion of appropriate rural buildings, and extensions to existing facilities, is supported by Government policy and the Council will support proposals where their location, nature and scale would not harm the character of the rural area.
- 8.91 Any harm to the character of the rural area will be judged in relation to the appearance of the building following conversion (see in particular policies DP1 (Layout and Design), DAP1 (Green Belt) and DP3 (Natural and Historic Environment and Landscape)) and the impact upon the character of surrounding roads (see RAP10). Any harm to sustainability objectives will be judged by the extent to which the proposal may lead to a dispersal of overall hotel bedspaces to a degree that may prejudice the viability of hotels within the urban areas, or may cause a significant increase of vehicle movements in less sustainable locations. In terms of proposals to extend existing accommodation, the test will be whether the additional accommodation intensifies the use of the site in a manner out of keeping with its rural location, or seeks to introduce new uses.