



WARWICK DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN

Public Local Inquiry 2006

Core Topic Paper 10

Rural Areas



1996 - 2011

February 2006

Warwick District Local Plan - Public Local Inquiry Core Topic Paper

Rural Areas

1. Introduction

1.1 This core topic paper gives information on rural issues addressed within the Warwick District Local Plan. This is one of a total of 12 core topic papers that have been prepared for the Public Inquiry into the Local Plan. These core topic papers do not seek to respond to individual objections to the local plan, but to provide background information on various key topics. The Council is also preparing detailed proofs of evidence and written statements that will respond to the detailed comments of objectors to the Local Plan. These will refer back to these core topic papers as necessary.

1.2 This core topic paper is structured to provide background information on the following key areas:-

- The Rural Areas of Warwick District
- Context
 - National
 - Regional and sub regional
 - Local
- The Policies of the Local Plan
 - A. Meeting housing needs within the rural area
 - B. Supporting the rural economy
 - C. Protecting the character of rural areas
 - D. Supporting rural services
 - E. Meeting the leisure and recreation needs of rural areas

2. The Rural Areas of Warwick District

2.1 Approximately 25,400 hectares within Warwick District lie outside of the urban areas of Leamington Spa, Warwick, Kenilworth and Whitnash. This is about 90% of the total area of the district, in which lives approximately 20% of the district's

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- population (2001 census). Approximately 81% of the rural area (20,545 hectares) lies within the West Midlands Green Belt.
- 2.2 The key characteristics of the rural area within Warwick District can be described as follows.
- 2.3 The area is heavily influenced by its proximity to the major urban areas of Coventry and Solihull as well as to the towns within the district. Nowhere within the rural area is more than 5 miles from an urban area. No part of the district would be described as being remote.
- 2.4 The rural area includes a number of settlements. The largest of these are the five villages of Barford, Bishops Tachbrook, Lapworth (Kingswood), Hampton Magna and Radford Semele which are identified as “limited growth villages” in the Local Plan. Other larger settlements include the other previously identified as “limited infill villages” in the adopted Local Plan. These are:-
- Ashow
 - Baddesley Clinton
 - Baginton
 - Bubbenhall
 - Eathorpe
 - Hampton on the Hill
 - Hatton
 - Leek Wootton
 - Norton Lindsey
 - Offchurch
 - Shrewley Common
 - Stoneleigh
- 2.5 Although a number of the District’s villages have employment opportunities and basic facilities including shops and a primary school, they are home to many commuters working either within the District or elsewhere, often within the West Midlands conurbation. The villages are attractive in character, and 14 include conservation areas.
- 2.6 The majority of the open countryside within the District is in agricultural use. In terms of landscape character, the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines (CD/907)¹ divide the district into four broad areas as shown in table 1.

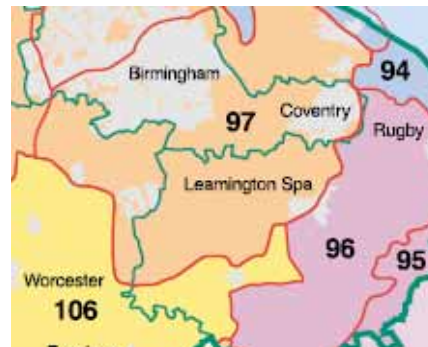
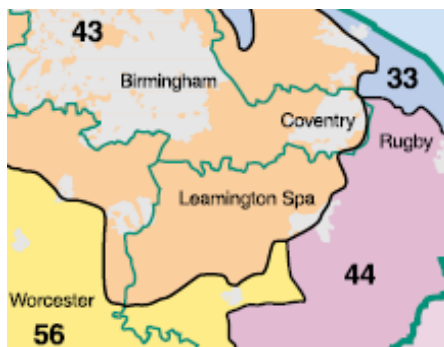
¹ Throughout this and the other topic papers, documents contained in the core document library for the Local Plan Inquiry are given their reference number; for example CD/16.

Table 1: Rural areas of Warwick District as defined by Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines

<i>Regional Character Areas</i>	<i>Area within District</i>
Arden – a historical region of former wood pasture and heath, characterized by a dispersed settlement pattern, ancient woodlands and mature hedgerow oaks.	The largest character area within the District. It includes all of the land to the west of the A46 and extends eastwards to the north of Warwick and Leamington as far as Stoneleigh village and Cubbington.
Dunsmore – a well wooded, and in places urbanized region characterized by low glacial plateaus, sandy soils and remnant heathy vegetation.	All the land to the east of Arden and to the north of Leamington including Baginton, Bubbenhall and as far south as Radford Semele.
Feldon – a lowland agricultural region strongly influenced by Tudor and parliamentary enclosures and characterized by heavy clay soils, large geometric fields and a nucleated settlement pattern of small rural villages.	All the remainder of the rural area incorporating land to the south of Warwick, Leamington and Whitnash from east of the A46 to Radford Semele except for the Avon area indicated below.
Avon Valley – a prosperous agricultural and market gardening region closely associated with the River Avon and characterized by historic market towns, nucleated villages and orchards.	Land adjacent to the River Avon running south west of Warwick through Barford and Wasperton and south out of the District towards Stratford.

2.7 More recently, the Regional Spatial Strategy assigned Natural and Character Areas to the whole West Midlands Region. These are shown in figure 1.

Fig 1: Natural and Character Areas identified in West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (Source: West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Figure 4 page 77)



Natural Areas

- 43 Midland Plateau
- 44 Midland Clay Pastures
- 56 Severn and Avon Vales

Character Areas

- 96 Dunsmore and Feldon
- 97 Arden
- 106 Forest of Dean and Lower Wye

- 2.8 The District also contains seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest (listed in paragraph 9.20 of the Local Plan and shown on the proposals map) and a number of Ancient Woodlands and Local Nature Reserves (shown on appendix 3 of the Local Plan and on the proposals map).
- 2.9 Communication links across the rural area and with adjoining areas (including the West Midlands conurbation) are good. There are several "A" class roads, a rail link that serves Leamington and Warwick with services into Birmingham and Coventry to the north and Banbury and London to the south (with stations at Warwick Parkway, Hatton and Lapworth), and the M40 motorway that bisects the rural area with three junctions within the District (all to the south and south west of Warwick and Leamington). The Grand Union Canal also crosses the District from the Fosse Way at the eastern end, through Leamington and Warwick, and then west towards Solihull.
- 2.10 The rural area is rich in history with a large number of ancient monuments, 516 listed buildings and a number of large historic houses including Packwood House

and Baddesley Clinton (both owned by the National Trust) and Stoneleigh Abbey. These last three houses are open to the public, and together with a number of other visitor attractions (including Hatton Country World, the Canal Centre at Hatton and the Lunt Roman Fort at Baginton) bring a significant number of visitors into the district.

- 2.11 The rural area includes a number of established large buildings and institutions. Many of these were once large homes that have found new uses in recent years; for example Haseley Manor (now a business centre) and Woodcote House in Leek Wootton (now the headquarters of the Warwickshire Police Authority). Some of these are now classified as Major Developed Sites within the Green Belt in this Local Plan. The largest such developments within the rural area are Stoneleigh Park (the National Agricultural Centre), the University of Warwick and Coventry Airport.

3. Context

- 3.1 There is an important national, regional and local context that has informed the development of policy in the Local Plan towards the rural areas.

National Context

- 3.2 The main sources of Government guidance on planning policy in rural areas comes from Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2: Green Belts), PPG3: Housing, PPG7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, PPG13: Transport and PPG17: Sport & Recreation.

PPG2: Green Belts (CD/1102)

- 3.3 This sets Government policy for the designation of areas of Green Belt and for the control of development within them. It sets out the criteria for including land within the Green Belt, the uses of land within the Green Belt and what may be considered appropriate development within Green Belt areas. It also sets down the circumstances in which otherwise inappropriate development may be permitted within Green Belt areas on major developed sites (PPG2: annex C).

PPG3: Housing (CD/1103)

- 3.4 This PPG sets out the Government's objectives for ensuring that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. Specifically in relation to rural areas, the guidance:-
- Sets out the circumstances where villages will be the suitable location for accommodating significant additional housing.
 - Seeks to ensure that there is adequate provision for housing in rural areas to meet the needs of local people. This includes allowing local authorities to allocate sites solely for affordable housing in villages and to include a "rural exceptions policy" to provide affordable housing to meet the needs of local people in locations which would not be released for general market housing.
- 3.5 A new draft Planning Policy Statement 3 (draft PPS3: Housing) was issued for public consultation in December 2005. Although this document is not Government policy it signals Government's proposed intentions and therefore is of note. This PPS continues the broad thrust of PPG3 in relation to rural areas, recognising the role of both market and affordable housing in villages where needed to contribute to their sustainability.

PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (CD/1007)

- 3.6 This document gives guidance on a wide range of issues. These can be summarised under the following key principles:-
- Decisions should be based on sustainable development principles set out more fully in Planning Policy Statement 1.
 - Good quality, carefully sited accessible development within existing villages should be allowed where it benefits the local economy and/or community and maintains and enhances the local environment.
 - Accessibility should be a key consideration in all development decisions.
 - New building development in the open countryside should generally be strictly controlled.
 - Priority should be given to the re-use of previously-developed land in most cases.
 - All development should be well designed.
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PPG13: Transport (DC/1113)

- 3.7 Within its overall objectives of (1) promoting sustainable transport choices, (2) promoting accessibility to jobs, shops, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling and (3) reducing the need to travel, PPG13 has specific guidance on rural areas. It recognises that the potential for using public transport and for non-recreational walking and cycling is more limited than in urban areas. Nevertheless, the guidance is still that jobs, shops, leisure facilities and services should be primarily sited at the most accessible locations in the local area. An integrated approach is called for to plan location decisions, service delivery and transport provision. The guidance also recognises that promoting adequate employment opportunities in rural areas can reduce the need for long-distance out-commuting to jobs in urban areas. Support is given to appropriate farm diversification proposals and to small-scale business development or expansion in appropriate cases.

PPG17: Sport & Recreation (CD/1117)

- 3.8 Within its wider role of providing guidance on this issue, this PPG has some specific guidance on both urban fringe and rural areas. It recognizes that the countryside provides a valuable resource for the provision of sport and recreation and that, within certain constraints, sport and recreation facilities should be provided within urban fringe areas provided those facilities are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. In other rural areas, only smaller scale facilities are generally likely to be acceptable where they are located in or adjacent to villages to meet the needs of the local community. Specific mention is, however, made of farm diversification schemes for sport and recreation which should be given favourable consideration.

Regional and Sub Regional ContextRegional Spatial Strategy (CD/1004)

- 3.9 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), issued by the Secretary of State in 2004, identifies the need for a “rural renaissance”; to address more effectively the major changes which are challenging the traditional roles of rural areas and the

countryside. Although the RSS identifies the western part of the West Midlands region as the focus for rural renaissance initiatives, it recognises a role for all the regions main towns and villages to deliver improved local services and develop their own distinctive role and character.

- 3.10 The RSS distinguishes the rural areas within Warwick District (and elsewhere in this part of the region) from those more remote rural areas in the “rural west” and north Staffordshire. It is understood that proximity to, and functional linkages with the major urban areas heavily influence rural areas within Warwickshire. For these rural areas, the priority will be to:-

“manage the rate and nature of further development to that required to meet local needs, whilst ensuring that local character is protected and enhanced.” (policy RR1)

- 3.11 The RSS recognises that policy priorities within rural areas will vary across the region according to a range of factors including the quality of the environment, the need for new employment and housing (including affordable housing), the need for access to services and the need to stem population decline.
- 3.12 In terms of economic development, the focus should be upon towns and other large settlements accessible to their hinterland (**policy PA14**). Priority should be given to economic activity that has a strong link with the rural area. Encouragement should be given to businesses using ICT and opportunities increased for home working. There is also a positive approach towards agriculture and farm diversification (**policy PA15**).
- 3.13 In terms of protecting the environment, the RSS reinforces the importance of the West Midlands Green Belt and supports the conservation and enhancement of the environment (**policy QE1**).
- 3.14 The RSS takes the Region’s “countryside character”, natural areas” and “historic landscapes” defined by the Countryside Agency, English Nature and English Heritage as an important context for its spatial strategy. These show the area of
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Warwick District covered by three distinct areas as shown on figure 1 above.

Policy QE6 ensures that a consistent approach is taken to their conservation, enhancement and, where necessary, restoration.

Warwickshire Structure Plan (1996-2011) (CD/908)

3.15 The Structure Plan, which was adopted in 2001, sets a clear context within which the Local Plan policies have been formulated. It includes a number of important principles including the following:-

- Most new development is to be directed towards the District's towns (all now defined as urban areas for the purposes of this Local Plan) (**policy GD.3**). Outside of these areas development should be provided to meet the needs of the local population. Development in rural areas should be aimed to achieve a balance between enhancing and protecting rural life (**policy RA.1**).
- Development should be related to a hierarchy of settlements as determined by the Local Plan (**policy RA.3**)
- Development should meet local needs as set out by the community in an appraisal or assessment set in the context of the Local Plan process (**policy RA.3**).
- Development should be planned so that the provision for all necessary supporting infrastructure and services are secured (**policy RA.3**).
- Local plans should give preference to the conversion of rural buildings in appropriate locations for employment use (**policy RA.4**).
- Continued protection is given to the West Midlands Green Belt (**policy GD.6**) and a broad area for this is defined.
- Local Plans should protect and enhance landscape character in all areas of Warwickshire's countryside. Continued protection is given to a number of Special Landscape Areas (**policy ER.4**) and a broad area for these is defined.
- The principle of maintaining "areas of restraint" within or adjoining the built up areas of towns is established (**policy ER.6**).

Local Context

- 3.16 The policies in the Local Plan have also been informed by a number of local policies, priorities and initiatives.
- 3.17 Within the **Warwick District Community Plan** (“Warwick 2020” – CD/103), many of the priorities and key actions that apply throughout the District apply with equal weight within the rural areas. For example, under the priority of enabling everyone to lead a healthy and active life (priority H2) are the key actions of increasing walking opportunities and increasing the number and range of sport and leisure activities for young people. Many of these are quoted elsewhere in the other core topic papers.
- 3.18 However there are a number of specific key actions that have a rural focus:-
- Develop Stoneleigh Park into a centre of excellence for rural enterprises
 - Support the Green Grocer Cooperative Wholesale Project.
 - Run rural transport schemes for young people to access sports activities in the town during school holidays.
- 3.19 Similarly, within the council's **corporate strategy** (CD/101), the majority of the priorities and targets apply equally to rural as well as urban areas. These are set out in other core topic papers.
- 3.20 Providing affordable housing in rural areas is an important part of the Council's overall objective of increasing levels of affordable housing provision throughout the district. It has worked alongside the Warwickshire Rural Housing Association to ensure that the proper steps are taken to establish local need under the PPS7 “rural exceptions” approach (as set out in the adopted Local Plan and in policy RAP5 of this Local Plan). Furthermore, it has advised local parish councils seeking to understand the needs within their parishes for affordable housing. The Council (in conjunction with Stratford on Avon District Council) has recently commissioned a new **Housing Needs Assessment** of Warwick and Stratford Districts. This will provide more guidance on housing need in both urban and

rural areas. More information on this is set out in the Affordable Housing core topic paper.

- 3.21 Within the District, the **Habitat Biodiversity Audit** has been an important project to establish a comprehensive survey of all wildlife habitats across Warwickshire. The project has been funded by all the local authorities across the County and carried out by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. More information on this project and what it has achieved can be found in the Natural Environment core topic paper and in policy DAP4 of the Local Plan.
- 3.22 In terms of protecting the historic environment, the Council has been undertaking a **review of all conservation areas** in the last five years. Its first priority here was a review of all rural and village conservation areas and this was completed in 2003. In addition to reviewing all these conservation areas and amending the boundaries to most of these following public consultation, the Council designated a new conservation area in Wasperton.
- 3.23 In terms of economic development within the rural areas, a number of agencies, led by Warwick District Council, Stratford District Council and Warwickshire County Council have created the **South Warwickshire Economic Development Strategy**. Although this strategy has a wide remit, it does develop a number of key initiatives for rural areas. Within the Delivery Plan are specific projects on “Rural Development”, “Vital Villages” and the “Open Countryside Initiative” (the latter having close links with the Royal Agricultural Society of England at Stoneleigh Park).

4. The Policies of the Local Plan

- 4.1 In the light of the policy context set out above, the policies within the Local Plan need to address the following key issues:-
- A. Meeting housing needs within the rural area
 - B. Supporting the rural economy
 - C. Protecting the character of rural areas
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- D. Supporting rural services
 - E. Meeting the leisure and recreation needs of rural areas
- A. Meeting Housing Needs**
- 4.2 Over recent years a considerable number of new homes have been built within the rural areas. In part this has been due to the identification of the former Hatton Hospital site in Hatton as a “rural growth point” in the adopted Local Plan and the allocation of over 600 houses here. The redevelopment of other redundant hospital sites at Hatton (King Edward VII hospital) and Weston Under Wetherley has further increased this provision. Aside from these however, there have been a significant number of new homes built elsewhere within the rural areas, particularly within the 17 “limited infill villages” identified in policy (DW) H8 of the adopted Local Plan (see also paragraph 2.4 above). This has been in part because the term “*single or very small groups of dwellings*” within that policy has needed to be understood since 2000 in the context of a revised PPG3 that supports higher density development. This has resulted in more new homes being built within the rural areas than was ever the expectation of the policy.
- 4.3 The amount of growth to be provided within the rural areas for this Local Plan period was set out within the Warwickshire Structure Plan, notably policies GD.3 and RA.3. This set down several important principles that apply with Warwick District.
- 4.4 **Firstly, since most development is to be directed towards urban areas, growth in rural areas must accordingly be restricted to help achieve this aim.** Policy GD.3 sets down a broad calculation for what should be the level of housing provision in rural areas. It defines “most” as meaning that within each district all of the migrant component of growth should be directed towards the towns. Furthermore, the towns should absorb at least the equivalent of their proportion of local growth. Therefore, growth within the rural areas should at most, be confined to meeting their proportion of local growth.
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4.5 For Warwick District, this can be worked out as follows. The proportion of the population living in the rural areas is 15% (1991 census). The “local needs” element of the total houses allocated to Warwick District in the Structure Plan (in policy H.1) is 35%, and the migrant component is 65% (see table B page 42 of the Structure Plan). The figures for Warwick District therefore are as set out in table 2.

Table 2: Calculation of Structure Plan housing requirement for Warwick District split between urban and rural areas - 1996 - 2011			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Migrant growth component (65%)	5,200	5,200	0
Local needs component of this (35%)	2,800	2,380	420
TOTAL	8,000	7,580	420

4.6 Table 3 below shows housing development within the rural areas since 1996. Most recent housing monitoring figures for 2005 show that within the rural area since 1996 a total of **1,113 new homes** have been built (see Housing Monitoring Report 2005 – table 18). Clearly this is greatly in excess of the figure of 420 proposed in the Structure Plan (see table 2 above). It is recognised that this figure is inflated by the three hospital sites identified in paragraph 4.2 above. These three sites together account for a total of 709 dwellings completed by 2005. Even if these sites are taken out of the figures, this still leaves a total of **404** completions between 1996 and 2005. Furthermore, there is an identified capacity (on the basis of existing planning permissions) for a further 176 new homes in rural areas (see Housing Monitoring Report 2005 – table 8 (CD/303))². Therefore, excluding the three hospital sites, the current total capacity within the rural areas (including completions and all sites with a planning permission) stands at **517 dwellings**. If the hospital sites are added in to this figure, the total rises to **1,289 dwellings**.

² It should be borne in mind that 63 of these are remaining dwellings to be constructed on the King Edward VII hospital site.

Table 3: Housing development within rural areas since 1996			
	<i>Hospital Sites</i>	<i>All other rural dwellings</i>	<i>Total</i>
Completions 1996 – 2005	709	404	1,113
Commitments at 1/4/05	63	113	176
Total	772	517	1,289
<i>Figures taken from 2005 Housing Monitoring Report</i>			

- 4.7 It is therefore abundantly clear from the above that housing growth within the rural area has already been exceeded (even if the large hospital sites noted above are excluded from the figures). Therefore any policy approach within the Local Plan must be one of strong restraint towards new housing within the rural area.
- 4.8 Following the issuing of the Regional Spatial Strategy in 2004, and subsequent advice from the Government about the relationship between figures contained within the RSS and the Structure Plan, it is arguable that the figures shown in tables 2 and 3 above need to be re-worked to only cover development in the period 2001 – 2011³. If this exercise is carried out, it continues to show that there is already an excess of housing in the rural areas over that required. These figures are set out in appendix 1 to this Core Paper.
- 4.9 **The second principle within the Structure Plan is that, as policy RA.3 makes clear, any housing permitted within rural areas must be related to a hierarchy of settlements as determined by local plans.** The policy sets out broadly how this hierarchy should be determined. It should relate to job opportunities, the availability of public transport and basic social facilities including at least a school, shop and bus service.
- 4.10 **Thirdly, housing in rural areas should be provided to meet the needs of local people and any new homes must be supported by evidence that they will help meet that need.**

³ More information on the reason behind this approach is given in the Housing Core Topic Paper.

- 4.11 In the light of this clear context, the policy approach of the Local Plan is by necessity restrictive, however seeks to ensure that genuine local needs within rural communities can be met.
- 4.12 It is important to note that the policy has changed, and become more flexible, between the first and revised deposit version of the Local Plan. The wording of the policy in the First Deposit Version followed extensive conformity discussions with the County Council following the County Council's concerns over the rate of house building in the rural areas. The policy in the First Deposit Version was considered to be in conformity with the Structure Plan. Following concerns expressed by objectors to the First Deposit Version of the Local Plan, the Council sought a more flexible approach in the Revised Deposit Version. Following further discussions, the County Council was still prepared to issue a statement of conformity for the Revised Deposit Version of the Local Plan, however it sought assurances that this more flexible approach would not result in a significant increase in the rate of house building in the rural areas. The District Council is continuing to monitor this and remains confident that the amount of additional housing that the revised policy would permit is small.
- 4.13 The approach of the Local Plan towards housing in rural areas is seen mainly in **policy RAP2**. This policy can be summarised by the following key principles.
- Any new building for housing should be on previously-developed land.
 - Any building of new open market housing is restricted to that which meets identified needs within the rural areas. Furthermore, it will only be permitted within a limited number of the largest villages within the rural areas where there exists the broadest range of shops, job opportunities, services and public transport opportunities (see paragraph 4.14 below).
 - The building of affordable housing within the rural areas is similarly restricted to the same limited number of larger villages except for where it meets a particular local need in accordance with **policy RAP5** as a “rural exceptions” site.
 - Housing for legitimate rural workers in accordance with PPS7 is permitted in **policy RAP6**.
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- There is provision for the conversion or subdivision of appropriate rural buildings to provide new housing, but only in circumstances where a number of specific criteria are met. These criteria relate to the whether:-
 - i) the rural building is in a sustainable location (within or adjacent to a village) in accordance with the principles contained within PPS7,
 - ii) the housing can meet an identified local need (in accordance with policy RA.3 of the Structure Plan) and,
 - iii) outside of the identified “limited growth villages”, other uses or a mixed use scheme have been fully explored before a housing proposal is considered.

4.14 A key element of the policy is the identification of the five “limited growth villages” listed in policy RAP2. These villages are Barford, Bishops Tachbrook, Hampton Magna, Lapworth/Kingswood and Radford Semele. Policy RA.3 of the Structure Plan sets out the broad principles against which any hierarchy of settlements should be based. For the purposes of the Local Plan, the criteria used are set out in paragraph 8.14. They are:-

- A shop/general store 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.

4.15 Whilst it is recognised that the above services and facilities may change in relation to any of the named villages (a shop or post office may close, a bus service may become less frequent or cease altogether), the five named villages did have all of the services in 2003 (when the Local Plan was drafted). Furthermore, these are the largest villages within the District by and many have other facilities also (such as employment opportunities and in the case of Lapworth, a railway station).

- 4.16 An example of where a local community within the District has sought to identify its need for housing is Barford. Work has been underway, led by the Barford Plans Group and reporting to the Barford, Sherbourne and Wasperton Joint Parish Council, to prepare a Parish Plan for the village. This incorporated a village appraisal exercise that was undertaken during the autumn/winter of 2004. This appraisal identified a need, not only for affordable housing within the village, but also for market housing, and this knowledge has been useful in subsequent discussions on a major planning application before the Council.
- 4.17 The provision of affordable housing in rural areas to meet local needs is addressed in **policy RAP5**. There is a policy to allow for such “rural exceptions” housing in the adopted Local Plan and this new policy draws directly from guidance in PPG3. The Council has a good working relationship with the Warwickshire Rural Housing Association (WRHA) who is the principle provider and manager of affordable housing in the rural areas of the District. The WRHA is part of the Council’s Joint Commissioning Partnership where the Council works alongside the key Registered Social Landlords operating in the District to provide affordable housing. More information on the work of this group is provided in the Affordable Housing core topic paper (CD/17). The WRHA has recently been successful in developing a scheme for five houses and one bungalow in this way, following completion of a local needs assessment, in the village of Hatton Station.

B. Supporting the rural economy

- 4.18 With the notable exception of the major developed sites in the Green Belt, Coventry airport and the Middlemarch Business Park in Baginton, employment opportunities in the rural areas are mainly small in scale.
- 4.19 The approach taken by the RSS and Structure Plan towards employment land and buildings in the rural area is to manage the rate and nature of further development to that required to meet local needs whilst ensuring that local character is protected and enhanced. This is also the approach of the Local

Plan. **Policy RAP7** sets down the circumstances where new employment will be permitted. This includes:-

- the conversion or replacement of appropriate buildings where these are appropriate in scale or can meet a local need,
- new development on previously-developed land in the limited growth villages where this meets a local need, and
- the redevelopment or expansion of existing employment uses unless the scale of this is greater than required to meet local need.

4.20 The Local Plan also gives support to farmers in the following ways:-

- It supports well-conceived appropriate farm diversification schemes (**policy RAP9**)
- It allows for permanent dwellings for suitable rural workers in locations where this would not otherwise be permitted (**policy RAP6**)
- It supports farm shops where these sell predominantly local goods and where they would not have an adverse impact upon existing rural shops in the area (**policy RAP12**).

4.21 An important part of the rural economy is tourism. In addition to a number of major visitor attractions in the rural area (identified in paragraph 2.10), the area as a whole is popular with visitors using the District as a base for exploring the heart of England or doing business in the area. There have been a number of planning applications in recent years for new visitor accommodation within the rural area, and particularly for extensions to some of already large hotels there. Many of these are within the Green Belt. The general approach of the Local Plan is to direct visitor accommodation into the urban area wherever possible. It recognises, however, that existing hotels may need to increase their capacity and that there are economic benefits of permitting conversion of appropriate rural buildings for small-scale new accommodation. **Policy RAP16** seeks to address this issue.

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- 4.22 Camping and caravan sites offer another means of accommodating visitor numbers, and **policy RAP15** provides a framework for considering proposals for these.
- 4.23 Hatton Country World to the west of Warwick offers an alternative source of rural employment, and now supports over 40 small businesses. It has become a significant visitor attraction, both for its shopping village (including a significant craft element) and for its farm park and other associated activities. Following concerns about alleged breaches of planning control and congestion on rural roads from rising visitor numbers, the Council prepared supplementary planning guidance for the site in 2000. Subsequent to this, a planning approval gave permission for an element of retail activity on the site, ensured that a significant craft element was maintained, and provided for measures to manage traffic approaching the site and improve landscaping within it. The Council recognises that Hatton Country World will continue to evolve over time. It is keen, however, that this does not result in an increase in visitor numbers, and that it is done in such a way that respects the sensitive location of the site and the possible impact of activities there. **Policy SSP8**, when read alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan, provides a framework for considering future proposals on this site.

C. Protecting the character of rural areas

- 4.24 In controlling the nature and scale of development in the rural areas, and in protecting key environmental assets, the Local Plan has a key role to play in protecting the environment and character of the rural area.

The Green Belt

- 4.25 The Local Plan continues the protection given to the **Green Belt** within the district. The strategic context for this has been reaffirmed through both the RSS and the Warwickshire Structure Plan and there is a policy in the adopted Local Plan. **Policy DAP1** sets the framework within the Local Plan for proposals within the Green Belt to be considered in accordance with current strategic policy and PPG2.

- 4.26 In terms of the boundary of the Green Belt, the broad extent of this is established through strategic policy. The broad area covered by the Green Belt in Warwick District did not alter between the publication of the previous strategic policy (the Warwickshire Structure Plan Alterations – 1989 -2001) against which the adopted Local Plan was prepared, and the adoption of the current Warwickshire Structure Plan. The adopted Local Plan shows a boundary for the Green Belt and includes an area totalling 20,545 hectares within it.
- 4.27 The Council is mindful of the advice in PPG2 that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered exceptionally. For this reason, whilst it has made a number of changes to the boundary of the Green Belt in the District, these are all minor in nature. None are considered, in the opinion of the Council to be strategic changes that should properly be made through a revision of strategic policy (which would now be done through a review of the Regional Spatial Strategy). All have been done with the purpose of ensuring that a consistent approach has been taken to the defining of Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the Structure Plan. The changes that have been made within the Local Plan are as follows:-
- a) The triangle of land bordered by Woodland Road and Highland Road, Kenilworth (known as Crackley Triangle). This open farm land was omitted from the Green Belt previously, however it is related closely with further open farmland to the north and is well defined to the south west and south east by the two above mentioned roads and the cutting of the Leamington to Coventry railway line. The Warwickshire Structure Plan shows the Green Belt around Kenilworth going right up to the edge of the urban area, and this is an example where, up until now, it has not. The lands inclusion within the Green Belt has received widespread support from local residents and the Crackley Resident's Association.
 - b) Land at Roman Way, Finham (Coventry) and at Pinehurst, Cubbington. Both of these areas were developed for housing in the 1980's and should logically be removed from the Green Belt.

- c) Land south of the Thwaites factory, Cubbington. This area was excluded from the adopted Green Belt however the Warwickshire Structure Plan shows the Green Belt in this location wrapping right around this part of Lillington and Cubbington. There is no extant permission for an extension of the Thwaites factory into this area, nor has there been in the recent past. It is an area of open farmland that is identical in character to the land to the west, east and south of it, all of which is already within the Green Belt. This site, at 9.4 hectares, is the largest single site to be included in the Green Belt by this Local Plan.
- d) Playing Fields at the following schools:-
- Cubbington C of E Combined School, New Street, Cubbington
 - Our Lady & Theresa's Junior & Infants School, Windmill Hill, Cubbington
 - St. Paul's C of E Combined School, Upper Holly Walk, Leamington
 - Castle Hill School, Rouncil Lane, Kenilworth.

A number of schools currently abut the Green Belt. In these instances here, whilst the buildings (and areas of hard standing and playground) relate most closely to the surrounding urban areas, their playing fields do not.

Previously, all of the school land was not within the Green Belt. The Council considers that the playing fields, however not the buildings, should be included within the Green Belt.

- e) Land at Parcelforce, Middlemarch Business Park. This site was developed in the late 1990's and approximately half of the most westward of the buildings is within Green Belt land. It is logical to re-draw the boundary so as to exclude this building in its entirety from the Green Belt.
- f) Land at Kenilworth Rugby Club. Along the southern side of Glasshouse Lane in Kenilworth, the rear of the gardens marks the boundary of the Green Belt. This small triangular site is an exception. It abuts the Rugby Club pitches which are in the Green Belt and relates much more closely with the
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open Green Belt land to the south than to the urban land to the north. It has been proposed for inclusion within the Green Belt.

- 4.28 As a result of these changes, a total of 19.3 hectares of land has been included within the Green Belt, and 8.5 hectares removed, leaving a net increase to the Green Belt of 11.3 hectares. This brings the total area of Green Belt in the District to 20,556 hectares.

Protecting the landscape

- 4.29 Historically, a significant part of the rural area (totalling 16,449 hectares) has been designated as “Special Landscape Areas” (SLA). This designation is recognised in the Warwickshire Structure Plan and in the adopted Local Plan (policy (DW) C8) which identifies two SLA’s; (1) an area relating to the former Forest of Arden and (2) an area typical of the Dunsmore landscape characteristics to the east of Warwick District encompassing much of the upper reaches of the River Leam Valley.
- 4.30 The First Deposit Version of this Local Plan (policy DAP3) maintained the SLA designation on the proposals map. However, in 2004, the Government published Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (CD/1107) as new planning guidance on rural areas (see paragraph 3.6 above). In this document, the Government recognises that there are areas of landscape which are highly valued locally. It believes, however, that “*carefully drafted criteria-based policies...utilising tools such as landscape character assessment, should provide sufficient protection for these areas without the need for rigid local designations that may unduly restrict acceptable, sustainable development and the economic activity that underpins the vitality of rural areas*”. (paragraph 24). The Government also considers that:-

“Local landscape designations should only be maintained or, exceptionally, extended where it can be clearly shown that criteria-based policies cannot provide the necessary protection....When reviewing their local area-wide development plans...planning authorities should rigorously consider the justification for retaining existing local landscape designations.” (PPS7: paragraph 25)

4.31 In making amendments following the comments received on the First Deposit Version of the Local Plan, and having regard to the above advice in PPS7, the Council decided to delete the Special Landscape Area designation from the Local Plan. The reasons for this are as follows:-

a) The policies in both the adopted Local Plan and First Deposit Version of the revised Local Plan seek to refuse development which will have a detrimental impact on the attractive landscape character and open nature of the SLA's. The Council now considers that the relevant criteria-based policies of the Revised Deposit Local Plan, when read together, do provide the necessary protection previously provided by these former SLA policies. In particular:-

- **policy DP1** requires that the layout and design of development contributes to character and quality of the environment, and
- **policy DP3** requires that development protects important natural features and positively contributes to the character and quality of the natural and historic environment. In this policy, development is required to protect features of significance and protect and enhance landscape character.

Other policies that provide additional protection within rural areas are **RAP1** (development within rural areas), **RAP8** (converting rural buildings), **RAP10** (rural roads) and, more generally, all of the other RAP policies in chapter 8 of the Local Plan. It is therefore considered that the objectives of previous SLA policies, and the protection that they gave to these areas, are equally well covered within the policy framework of the new Local Plan.

b) Detailed guidance on the precise character of the landscape to be protected within the SLA's is found in the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines, which were prepared by Warwickshire County Council and approved in 1993 as supplementary planning guidance within Warwick District. This document (CD/907) does not confine itself only to the designated SLA's however provides guidelines covering all of the rural areas within Warwick District. Policy DP3 of the Revised Deposit Version of the Local Plan makes a cross

reference to the Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines (paragraph 4.19A) and makes it clear that this advice should be applied throughout the rural area. In doing so, it recognises the character and value of those areas not previously identified as Special Landscape Areas. The policy does, however, also draw attention to the broad extent of the Special Landscape Areas identified by the Structure Plan and ensures that these sensitive areas are afforded proper protection.

Controlling householder development

- 4.32 At a much smaller scale than the above, but still important, the impact upon the landscape and character of the countryside of works to individual homes can be significant. Every year, many householders in rural areas seek to extend their homes and this can have a significant impact upon the character of the landscape and the openness of the countryside generally. Extensions to properties can make a real benefit to the appearance of a property and can be done in a sympathetic way. Some larger extensions can, however, alter the character and appearance of a property and turn what was a modest house into something much larger. This has a consequent impact upon the appearance of the wider countryside.
- 4.33 **Policy RAP3** provides a framework for dealing with all such extension proposals. Although it does indicate a general scale of extension that is likely to be disproportionate (paragraph 8.24), the guiding principle behind the policy is that extensions will be permitted unless they do not respect the character of the original dwelling, do not retain the openness of the rural area or they substantially alter the scale, design and character of the original dwelling.
- 4.34 The District has also seen, in the past, proposals to demolish perfectly sound properties in the countryside and replace these with larger properties. This again can have a significant impact upon the openness and character of the countryside. **Policy RAP4** provides a framework for considering such proposals. This is based on the principle that replacement dwellings should not be considered unless the original dwelling is either of poor design or is structurally

unsound. It also established the principle that replacement dwellings should not be materially larger than that which they replace.

Converting or replacing rural buildings

- 4.35 The Council takes a positive approach to the conversion of appropriate rural buildings in accordance with guidance in PPS7. In terms of the use to which rural buildings can be put, this is controlled through different policies in the Local Plan. In accordance with paragraph 17 of PPS7, re-use for an economic development is usually preferable and support is given to appropriate conversion to employment use (**RAP7**), for a farm shop (**RAP12**), or to visitor accommodation (**RAP16**). Conversions to residential use are supported within **RAP2**, but only in certain circumstances. These are where the building is in an appropriate location (within or adjacent to a village), where it meets a local need for housing and where, outside of the five “limited growth villages”, an applicant can demonstrate that other uses have been actively considered.
- 4.36 In terms of whether the principle of conversion will be acceptable for any building, the principles of this are set out in **policy RAP8**. Warwick District contains a wealth of traditional rural buildings, some of which are listed, however many more are of local interest. Clearly, given the District’s location, many come under pressure for conversion to other uses, and it is particularly important that the policy gives these buildings adequate protection from unsympathetic development. The Council has produced a specific design guidance leaflet “Agricultural Buildings & Conversions” to give further information on this subject (CD/604).
- 4.37 A new feature of PPS7 is that it permits the replacement of suitable buildings in the countryside. Accordingly, the Revised Deposit Version of the Local Plan contains a new **policy RAP8a** to provide a framework for determining planning applications of this type. Here, the emphasis, in accordance with PPS7, is for supporting the replacement of a building where this would bring about an environmental improvement in terms of the impact of the development on its surroundings and the landscape. It should be noted that the Council has taken the view that this policy only applies outside of the Green Belt, since PPS7 does not indicate that the replacement of a rural building is not inappropriate

development within a Green Belt location. Whilst this policy does provide criteria for assessing the suitability or otherwise of a proposal to replace a building in the Green Belt, any such proposal, in the Council's opinion, must still be considered as a departure from the development plan.

D. Supporting Rural Services

4.38 It is recognised that the population of the district's rural areas is, for the large part, affluent. Many people will generally seek to meet many of their service needs and many of their shopping needs for all but basic day-to-day items in the nearby main urban areas. Furthermore, the rural area contains no market towns that can act as a focal point for rural life. Nevertheless, the District contains some vibrant villages offering a range of shops, services and facilities, and it is important that the Local Plan seeks to give these as much protection as possible in accordance with PPS7. This is done by giving support to:-

- The development of new or the expansion of existing shops and services within rural areas where these meet local retail or service needs (**policy RAP11**).
- Resisting the loss of existing shops (**policy RAP11**)
- Farm shops (**policy RAP12**)
- Small scale outdoor leisure and recreation developments within or adjacent to settlements (**policy RAP13**)
- Protecting open spaces (**policy SC5**) and sports and recreation facilities (**policy SC6**)
- Creating new and protecting existing community facilities (**policies SC7 and SC7a**)
- Securing the continued use of the railway stations at Hatton, Lapworth and Warwick Parkway (**policy SC3**).

E. Leisure and recreation

4.39 The rural area is under significant pressure for development for leisure and recreation. This pressure comes from two sources; firstly (and principally) from

the general population seeking opportunities for leisure use that cannot be found in the urban areas because either the space required is not available or the nature of the activity is not conducive in an urban area, and secondly from rural communities themselves. The Local Plan needs to balance these competing objectives within a wider context of promoting sustainable development.

- 4.40 The policy directing new outdoor sport and recreation development in rural areas is **policy RAP13**. In accordance with PPG17 above, this directs major developments to locations that are, or can be made, highly accessible to the urban area by alternatives to the private car. Smaller scale developments meeting the needs of local communities are allowed adjacent to settlements. Support is given to farm diversifications proposals in the open countryside provided there are no other sites available to meet the needs of local communities closer to settlements.
- 4.41 The District has a number of golf courses. These take up large areas of land and can have a significant impact upon landscape quality and biodiversity. The Council considers that no further golf courses should be provided unless there is convincing evidence of the need for further courses. This advice is contained in policy **RAP14**.

Appendix 1

Calculation of the requirement for, and provision of, housing within the rural areas of Warwick District, 2001 – 2011.

These tables show a re-working of the information shown in tables 2 and 3 within the main body of the Core Proof. The difference here is that these tables only cover the period 2001 – 2011 in accordance with the strategic housing figures provided in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. All other assumptions remain unchanged. These are set out in paragraphs 4.4 above and are as follows:-

- The migrant growth component of Warwick District's total housing allocation is 65% and the local growth element is therefore 35%.
- Of the total population in the District, 85% live in the urban and 15% within the rural areas.
- All migrant growth should be directed towards the urban areas. Total growth within the rural areas should therefore at most be confined to meeting the rural area's proportion of any local growth.

Table A1: Calculation of Structure Plan housing requirement for Warwick District split between urban and rural areas - 2001 - 2011

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Migrant growth component (65%)	3006	3006	0
Local needs component of this (35%)	1618	1375	243
TOTAL	4,624	4,381	243

Table A2: Housing development within rural areas since 2001

	<i>Hospital Sites</i>	<i>All other rural dwellings</i>	<i>Total</i>
Completions 2001 – 2005	208	166	374
Commitments at 1/4/05	63	113	176
Total	271	279	550

Figures taken from 2005 Housing Monitoring Report

NB: In relation to the hospital sites, it should be noted that all of the development at Weston Under Wetherley was completed by 2001, together with the majority at Hatton Park. None of the development at the King Edward VII hospital had been commenced in 2001.