

3. Environmental Context

"This Common Inheritance": Appropriate Action

Land Use

- the production of District-wide Local Plans;
- enabling effective action over contravention of planning laws;
- ensuring that new development protects and enhances the environment;
- greater emphasis on environmental assessment.

The Countryside

- giving greater encouragement to farmers to manage land for the benefit of wildlife and the landscape;
- encourage landowners and farmers to manage and protect key landscape features which are under particular pressure from visitors;
- endorsing the Countryside Commission's target to bring all public footpaths and bridleways into good order by the end of the century;
- better management of, and access to, common land;
- greater local authority control over the siting and appearance of new farm and forestry buildings;
- a new hedgerow protection scheme;
- guidance on planning issues relating to wildlife;
- continued support for English Nature.

Towns and Cities

- encourage the provision of good recreational land;
- ensure the viability and vitality of town centres;
- promote measures to 'civilise' traffic and reduce congestion;
- provide by-passes to relieve towns of through traffic where needed;
- encourage good design;
- ensure urban projects help the local economy and the environment.

Heritage

- increasing support for and guidance on historic buildings and historic town centres;
- better protection for Scheduled Monuments;
- register of historic landscape sites;
- ensuring minimal environmental damage by tourists;
- promoting public interest and involvement.

Towards Sustainability

3.1 Environmental issues such as depletion of the ozone layer, the finite nature of the resources of the earth, and global warming now receive much media publicity and are the subject of public concern. This concern is likely to continue to grow into the next century as people become more aware of the environmental consequences of activities and life-styles both at home and abroad. Tackling these problems requires international and national co-operation. Obligations and agreements are now being introduced to operate at all appropriate levels of Governmental responsibility. The Council is able, however, to implement its own initiatives - albeit at a small scale by comparison - to affect activities and lifestyles in the District.

3.2 The World Commission on Environment and Development (known as The Brundtland Commission), introduced the concept of 'sustainable development' in its 1987 report 'Our Common Future'. This is defined as that which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. This may be considered to mean:-

- ensuring the efficient use of land and other resources in environmental terms; and
- minimising developments that are harmful to the environment and human health.

3.3 Sustainable development makes the use of resources, the development of new technology, the direction of investments and changes in Governmental responsibilities consistent with future as well as present needs. This will require the integration of economic goals with the conservation of the environment. It is a long term objective:- the challenge now is to identify practical methods of implementing the concept at national and local levels.

3.4 The European Community endeavours to promote sustainability via the harmonisation of environmental policy across all member states. It does this by issuing Directives to be implemented by the laws or regulations of member states within a specified timescale. One such Directive requires an Environmental Assessment to be undertaken as part of local authorities' consideration of planning applications for specified major developments. A document entitled "The Essex Guide to Environmental Assessment", produced by the Essex Planning Officers' Association, promotes a consistent approach to environmental assessment across the County and provides guidance to those involved in the development process.

The Government's Response

3.5 The Government has responded to the growing public awareness and concern about national and international environmental issues by publishing a White Paper "This Common Inheritance" in 1990. It places a responsibility on Development Plans "... to take environmental considerations comprehensively and consistently into account." It also puts forward appropriate action under the headings of land use, the countryside, towns and cities, and heritage (see opposite).

3.6 The White Paper also refers to the need to control pollution and looks at the scope for action in terms of air, noise, water and hazardous substances. It also encourages recycling, particularly from domestic waste.

3.7 Government guidance on environmental matters in planning is set out in several PPGs. PPG1 specifies that sustainable development seeks to achieve "economic development to secure higher living standards while protecting and enhancing the environment". PPG12 calls upon local authorities to reflect the new environmental concerns (such as global warming and the consumption of non-renewable resources) in the assessment of policies. It goes on to state that "conservation and development should not be seen as necessarily in conflict" but that "policies for land use must weigh and reconcile priorities in the public interest".

3.8 Local authorities are now required to include policies to secure the conservation of natural beauty and amenity of land in drawing up Development Plans. These should reflect the practical measures needed to protect and improve natural features in town and country.

3.9 Plans must, however, make adequate provision for development. They are also able to contribute to the Government's objective of ensuring that development and growth are sustainable. This is explained as meaning that development decisions ".....should not deny future generations the best of today's environment."

3.10 PPG12 gives particular emphasis to energy conservation. One of the ways this can be addressed is in the location of new development. It may be possible to guide development to locations which reduce the need for car journeys and the distance driven, or which permit the choice of more energy-efficient public transport or cycling or walking. Such travel patterns would not only reduce energy consumption but also reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. PPG17 contains relevant advice as well in this respect.

3.11 The environmental implications of Plan policies should be appraised as part of the Plan preparation process, and the outcome set out in the reasoned justification. This Plan does this through a section entitled 'Environmental Implications' in each topic chapter which identifies:-

- (i) the Plan's environmental aims upon which the policies will have a bearing; and
- (ii) whether the policies will have an impact on key environmental criteria (set out in Appendix 2).

3.12 PPG13 calls upon local authorities, in preparing their Development Plans, to co-ordinate their policies for transport and other forms of development. It states that Development Plans should aim to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, by:

- influencing the location of different types of development relative to transport provision (and vice versa); and
- fostering forms of development which encourage walking, cycling and public transport use.

PPG13 goes on to say that to meet these aims local authorities should adopt planning and land-use policies which:

- promote development within urban areas at locations highly accessible by means other than the private car;
- locate major generators of travel demand in existing centres;
- strengthen existing local centres;
- maintain and improve choices for alternative means of transport to the car; and
- limit parking provision to discourage reliance on the car for work and other journeys where there are effective alternatives.

The Council's Response

3.13 Epping Forest District Council has always acknowledged the importance of environmental protection. Laws have been rigorously enforced and the Green Belt vigorously defended. The Council has adopted its 'Environmental Charter' as a continuing commitment to environmental protection and reflecting the importance attributed to it. The Charter outlines the Council's achievements and intentions under the headings of health, pollution, energy conservation,

recycling and a strategy for town and countryside. These cover a range of activities including:-

- outlining the scope of services provided;
- adopting bye-laws;
- adopting appropriate management practices;
- participating in recycling schemes;
- assisting relevant voluntary bodies; and
- formulating and implementing appropriate planning policies.

3.14 Whilst it is the planning policies which are particularly relevant to this Local Plan, several of the other initiatives have potential land use implications. The approaches which the Council has adopted, and which are pursued, or reinforced, in this Plan are:-

- the continued protection of the local environment by protection of the Green Belt from adverse development;
- protecting and improving townscapes by preserving open spaces worthy of retention and preventing town cramming;
- securing higher standards of estate layouts and building design;
- scrutinising the environmental impact of road proposals and major developments;
- protecting existing trees and shrubs and requiring appropriate additional landscaping;
- environmentally conscious management of Council-owned land;
- providing design advice in sensitive areas;
- protecting historic buildings from further deterioration;
- accommodating 'banks' for the collection of recyclable materials;
- minimising certain types of pollution.

3.15 This Local Plan is the vehicle by which the new initiatives will become 'formal' land use planning policies. The Council intends that the overall approach and policies of this Local Plan will adhere to the concept of sustainable development. This will be put into practice in the context of:-

- (i) dealing with land use and development issues; and
- (ii) managing the environmental resources of the District.

giving priority to improving the local environment in conjunction with meeting the recognised needs in the locality. The Council considers that this approach will result in sustainable development being achieved. It is unlikely, however, that such an approach will lead to any significant changes in the pattern of land use and development from that which has resulted from previous policies.

Implications for the Local Plan

3.16 From the foregoing it might appear that the environmental consequences of planning decisions change from being only one of, to THE most important, determining factors. However, this is not to say that the potential contributory effect of, for example, road building upon matters of global concern will hold sway over local considerations. This would not be 'sustainable' unless local needs were met. Given that the character and quality of the environment of this District will remain of paramount importance then this, in itself, will contribute to broader-scale sustainable development.

3.17 This Local Plan will enhance the environment of the District by:-

- locating new development so as to minimise the need for private transport - hence minimising emissions of environmentally damaging gases from vehicles;
- protecting and enhancing the built environment;
- protecting and enhancing open spaces (in both town and country); and
- protecting and enhancing the natural environment (comprising both wildlife and its habitats).

3.18 It should be borne in mind, however, that some of these measures may conflict with one another. For example, potential development sites which are conveniently located for public transport facilities offering ready access to employment foci (e.g. Central Line stations) may also provide valuable open space and an important wildlife habitat. Similarly, the Green Belt policy, which applies to the countryside areas of this District, already has the effect of preserving the open countryside and concentrating maximum appropriate use on available urban sites. However, it also results in land-owners being unable to develop sites in a way which would reduce commuters' trips to work. This, in turn, may lead to more energy consumption and generate more CO₂ than if commuters were able to live on the edge of the metropolitan area.

3.19 Where there is apparent conflict between various measures in this fashion the Plan resolves them by

3.20 The opportunities for increased environmental emphasis in this Plan relate particularly to:-

- the detailed nature of the development (as distinct from the generalised land use);
- enhancing what is already of merit;
- minimising pollution; and
- enabling and encouraging recycling and the efficient use of resources.

These opportunities are pursued in the relevant chapters in the Plan.

3.18 The Council will work closely with the Environment Agency to promote integrated environmental management. The Environment Agency intends to publish Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) based on discrete natural surface water drainage areas. The LEAPs will deal with all issues affecting the quality of air, land and water and the Agency hopes to involve all interested parties in their production. LEAPs will gradually replace Catchment Management Plans which were prepared by the National Rivers Authority.

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