

12. The Countryside and The Villages

Local Plan Aim

To conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Borough's countryside, protect the rural areas from adverse environmental impact and promote a healthy rural economy.

Key Objectives

1. To conserve and enhance the countryside for its own sake.
2. To ~~provide long term protection for Special Landscape Areas and Areas of Local Landscape Importance~~ *conserve landscape character* by giving priority to the ~~conservation~~ *preservation* and enhancement of the natural beauty *and positive aspects* of the *local* landscape.
3. To prevent development which will materially harm the scientific or wildlife interests of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest and National and Local Nature Reserves.
3a To prevent development that will adversely affect species protected by law.
3b To encourage proposals which contribute to the objectives of the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan.
4. To minimise the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land and ensure that viable agricultural units are protected.
5. To permit small scale, infill development in villages which generates no significant adverse environmental impact on the existing density, scale and character.
6. To promote greater accessibility to the countryside without adversely affecting its character.
7. To protect the character of historic rural lanes.

12.1 Introduction

- 12.1.1 Whilst much of the northern part of the Borough has been developed, the southern part remains as substantially open countryside. Its topography and character is typical of the downland landscapes of southern England, and although its visual quality may not be outstanding, it is nonetheless attractive and forms an important backdrop to the Thameside urban area. The openness of the countryside is punctuated by a number of villages, some of which have lost their original identity and sympathetic visual relationship with the rural landscape as a result of substantial housing developments of a suburban character. Some of the countryside has been damaged by mineral extraction and is generally vulnerable to the pressures of the 'urban fringe'. The majority of the countryside lies within the Green Belt.
- 12.1.2 Most of Dartford's countryside is still in agricultural use and a significant proportion of it is within grades 1, 2 and 3a (the best and most versatile agricultural land). The area's proximity to major produce markets has stimulated the development of a market gardening agricultural economy in parts of the Borough.
- 12.1.3 Aside from agriculture, woodlands make up the other major land use in the Borough's countryside. Joydens Wood, Darenth Wood, and Lords and Ladies Woods are important for both landscape and ecological reasons. Darenth Wood is especially important: it is an ancient semi-natural broad-leaved woodland, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and regarded by English Nature as one of the county's key nature conservation sites, harbouring many nationally rare and scarce species.
- 12.1.4 Dartford's villages range from small settlements such as Betsham, to sizeable areas such as at New Barn. Their proximity to the main highway network and to the urban

facilities and employment opportunities in the Borough and in adjoining areas, means that they act very much as dormitory settlements with only limited ties with the agricultural economy.

12.1.5 Some of the villages saw considerable housing development in the 1950s and 1960s, although this reduced in the 1970s and 1980s as Green Belt and Structure Plan restraint policies became increasingly effective. Indeed, a key function of local plans within Kent is to identify the settlements to which Structure Plan village policies should apply and to define their confines.

12.1.6 The Local Plan has a crucial role to play in stimulating major growth and development in the north of the Borough while, at the same time, conserving and enhancing the best of the Borough's natural resources, found predominantly in the south. The proximity to London and Dartford's position within the heart of Thames Gateway makes it all the more important for the policies of the Local Plan to help ensure that the rural areas are protected from inappropriate and unacceptable development.

12.2 Policy Context

12.2.1 The government's policies for the countryside are set out in the White Paper "Rural England: A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside" (1995). They are based on ensuring both rural prosperity and the protection and enhancement of the character of the countryside through the pursuit of sustainable development and a shared responsibility for the countryside as a national asset, which serves people who live and work there as well as visitors.

12.2.2 Guidance on land-use planning in rural areas is set out in PPG7 (The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development) and PPG9 (Nature Conservation). The guiding principle in PPG7 for the countryside is that development should both benefit economic activity and maintain or enhance the environment. *However, rural Dartford lies close to an economically buoyant conurbation and is subject to considerable development pressure. Therefore, the imperative for economic development in the countryside implicit in much of PPG7 – and which is appropriate in more remote and economically depressed areas – is of less relevance in this area.* Building in the open countryside, away from existing settlements or from areas allocated for development in development plans, should be strictly controlled. PPG9 states that a key task is to ensure a balance between development and growth whilst maintaining the conservation of wildlife and natural features.

12.2.3 The Kent Structure Plan supports the protection of the countryside for its own sake. It establishes the principle of general restraint of development in rural Kent, whilst providing for community, employment and housing needs to be met.

12.2.4 The Kent Countryside Strategy (1997), produced by Kent County Council, aims to:

- a) conserve and enhance the landscape, ecology and historic heritage of the Kent countryside;
- b) encourage the provision of facilities to meet public demand for countryside recreation; and
- c) encourage sustainable rural diversification, development and services.

12.2.5 The Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (1997), produced by the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, has as its goal "to conserve and enhance biological diversity in

Kent and to contribute to the conservation of national and global biodiversity". The Plan's key objectives are to:

- a) maintain and, where practicable, to enhance:
 - the overall populations and natural ranges of native species and the quality and range of wildlife habitats and ecosystems;
 - internationally and nationally important and threatened species, habitats and ecosystems;
 - species, habitats and natural and managed ecosystems that are characteristic of Kent;
 - the biodiversity of natural and semi-natural habitats, where this has diminished over recent decades;
- b) increase public awareness of, and involvement in, conserving biodiversity; and
- c) identify priorities for habitat and species conservation in Kent and set realistic targets and time-scales for these.

12.2.6 The North West Kent Landscape Assessment (1998), also produced by Kent County Council, states that the key landscape objectives are to:

- a) restore the landscape structure and promote the management of remaining hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodlands;
- b) restore and extend the existing broadleaf woodland and create new copses and woodland; and
- c) retain and recover the rural character of the lanes.

12.3 Development in the Countryside

12.3.1. The countryside is generally defined as land beyond the confines of the urban areas and the villages inset on the Proposals Map. The generally open character of the countryside means that development within it is more conspicuous than within the urban area or villages. Inappropriate development in the countryside can prejudice this open character and damage the landscape. It is especially important, therefore, that buildings are well designed and carefully sited. Generally, development will be limited to that related to the rural economy, whilst recognising that agricultural considerations are less dominant than previously. Policy C1 establishes the overall approach to development in the countryside. Retail development in the rural area is also referred to in the Retail chapter.

C1 Development in the Countryside

Development in the countryside will not be permitted if:

- 1. it would result in ~~an adverse impact~~ on the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a under the Ministry of Agriculture's land classification criteria);**
- 2. it would result in a material adverse impact on**
 - (i) the surrounding rural amenity,**
 - (ii) nature conservation interests or**
 - (iii) the rural landscape; or**
- 3. it ~~is not in~~ would not be in keeping with a rural location.**

Rural Buildings

12.3.2 Rural buildings that are no longer in use can provide opportunities for new uses. *PPG7 discriminates in favour of reuse of such buildings for business rather than residential purposes. However it is important to note that green belt areas close to the conurbation differ from the generality of remote economically depressed rural areas addressed in PPG7. It is important, however necessary to establish criteria against which to assess the effects of any such proposal on the countryside and on rural amenity. Policy GB3 in the Green Belt chapter covers the re-use of buildings within the Green Belt. Outside the Green Belt but within the rural area, including those villages inset on the Proposals Map, the following policy will apply.*

C2 Re-use of a Rural Building

Proposals for the re-use of a rural building will be granted provided that:

- 1. the building is of substantial, sound and permanent construction and is proposed for re-use or adaptation without major or complete reconstruction;**
- 2. the form, bulk and general design of the building is in keeping with its surroundings;**
- 3. any conversion work respects local building styles and materials;**
- 4. the traffic to be generated by the new use can be safely accommodated by the site access and the local road system, and will not adversely affect the local environment or the amenity of rural lanes;**
- 4a ~~and there is sufficient parking provision~~ the parking provision is in accordance with Appendix 9;**
- 5. the proposed use will not harm the local environment through the creation of noise, dust, smoke, fumes, grit, vibration or any form of water, soil or air pollution;**
- 6. no new fences, walls or other structures, open storage or car parking associated with the use of the building; or the definition of its curtilage or any sub-division of it; will be erected if they would harm the visual amenity of the countryside; and**
- 7. the cumulative effects of both existing and permitted uses within the vicinity would not result in a material impact on traffic, parking and residential amenity in the local area.**

Horses and Stabling

12.3.3 Horse riding and the keeping of horses is a popular recreational activity within the rural area which can have a significant impact on the rural landscape, level of traffic on roads and on the residential amenities of properties close to stables. Whether the use of land and buildings for the keeping of horses and for riding requires planning permission depends on whether the horses are used for agricultural purposes or, if for recreational purposes to some extent, on whether the use is domestic or commercial in nature. The removal of jumps and associated equipment when not in use may be required by a condition applied to the planning permission. Where necessary the Local Planning Authority will consider serving an Article 4 direction under the General Permitted Development Order restricting permitted development rights if it is of the opinion that the landscape might be significantly harmed. The recent trend towards the sale of fields for horse keeping can lead to a deterioration of both the land and the landscape, if insufficient thought is given to the size, boundary treatment and management of the fields. The scale and intensity of the use on a site and the cumulative effects of stables and horse riding facilities on adjoining sites will be a material consideration in determining any planning application. Any application will have to demonstrate that adequate land is available for grazing and that the management of the grazing land will prevent the deterioration of good vegetation.

Proposals for the use of land for horses or for the erection of stables should comply with the criteria set out in Appendix 16.

C3 Use of Land for Horses or for Stables and Related Facilities

Proposals for the use of land for horses or for the erection of stables and related facilities that would detract from the quality of the environment or from the amenities of neighbouring properties will not be permitted. Where proposals are acceptable in principle, they will be subject to the criteria set out in Appendix 16.

Agricultural Land

(previous paragraph 12.3.6 renumbered as 12.3.4:)

12.3.64 Kent Structure Plan policy ED6 protects the long-term productive potential of the best and most versatile agricultural land (graded 1,2 and 3a under the Ministry of Agriculture's land classification criteria). Considerable weight should be given to protecting such land against development, because of its special importance. Where there is a choice between sites of different classifications, development should be directed towards land of the lowest possible classification.

C4 Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Proposals involving the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (graded 1, 2 and 3a under the Ministry of Agriculture's land classification criteria) will not be permitted.

Farm Diversification

(previous paragraph 12.3.4 renumbered as 12.3.5:)

12.3.45 Changes in agricultural practices and payments, largely related to the European Common Agricultural Policy, are leading to pressures for diversification and alternative uses, including recreational pursuits. Such diversification can provide important sources of farm income.

~~12.3.5 The government has indicated in PPG7 that it is important to sustain the process of diversification and to accommodate change, while continuing to conserve the full and varied countryside for the benefit and enjoyment of rural communities and visitors. Maintaining a healthy rural economy is one of the best ways of protecting and improving the countryside.~~

~~12.3.7 Proposals to diversify existing farming activities, whilst generally supported, will be subject to consideration against the general policies in the plan. Where planning permission is granted the Local Planning Authority may require a legal agreement to ensure that the particular enterprise remains part of the farm business and a genuine source of revenue to the farm.~~

12.3.6 *However, in Dartford's Green Belt area close to the conurbation, which is under extreme development pressure, farm diversification can lead to the danger of creeping urbanisation. Potential problems include the need for more buildings, open storage and car parking, and traffic generation. It is therefore necessary to establish principles to ensure that new activities do not erode the essential characteristics of the countryside. In particular it is important to safeguard:*

- *landscape character, especially its openness and the features associated with traditional agricultural activity*
- *rural tranquillity and the facility for quiet informal recreation*
- *nature conservation interests*

Possibilities for diversification include:

- *farm shops, selling produce from the farm itself. However the importation of goods to sell can lead to a retail use that might threaten the viability of nearby centres and create excessive traffic generation, contrary to government advice in PPG6;*
- *food processing and packaging. Such industrial activity is normally more appropriate and sustainable in employment areas. However a small scale operation, related to produce from the farm, may be acceptable;*
- *farm workshops and other farm-related services. On a small scale these may be acceptable, especially as a means of reusing farm buildings, but the Council will need assurance that such activity would not lead to excessive expansion or traffic generation;*
- *farm sports. However these will not be acceptable where they lead to the erosion of rural character, such as the loss of tranquillity caused by grouse shooting;*
- *energy crops. Short rotation coppicing to produce bio-fuel can be especially beneficial for nature conservation and rural amenity;*
- *woodland. There is particular scope for woodland-based enterprise. Woodlands are effective in reducing the impacts of commercial outdoor recreational activity.*

C4a Farm Diversification

Proposals for farm diversification will not be permitted if they result in:

- 1. the need, or potential need, for new buildings or open storage. Further, the Council will seek to ensure that buildings constructed by way of agricultural permitted development are not prematurely converted to other uses;***
- 2. excessive traffic generation or the need for an unacceptable amount of car parking;***
- 3. the loss of rural amenity in terms of:***
 - a. landscape character;***
 - b. nature conservation;***
 - c. tranquillity; and***
 - d. informal recreational activity.***

A legal agreement may be sought to ensure that the enterprise remains part of the farm and a genuine source of revenue to that operation.

Agricultural Buildings

12.3.8 New agricultural buildings including farm buildings and other structures can have a major impact on the countryside, but this can often be ameliorated by careful attention to siting and design. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants planning permission for certain agricultural and forestry developments. These 'permitted development rights' mean that a specific planning permission is not needed if a development falls within one of the categories set out in the General Permitted Development Order and meets all the conditions laid down in it. *The Order provides that if a building thus permitted ceases to be used for agricultural purposes within ten years of its substantial completion, and no permission for an alternative use is granted, then it must be removed.* Developments not covered by these rights require planning permission in the usual way. *In cases where it is*

essential for agricultural or forestry workers to be close to their place of work, proposals for dwellings will be considered against the functional and financial tests in PPG7, and an appropriate occupancy condition will be applied.

C5 Agricultural Buildings

Proposals for new agricultural buildings will only be permitted where they:

- 1. demonstrate a need for the development proposed;**
- 2. are of a scale and design, and use materials which are appropriate to the building's use and to the surrounding countryside;**
- 3. are sited to take advantage of the local topography and landscape in order to minimise their impact; and**
- 4. are grouped so as to avoid the proliferation of isolated structures in the countryside.**

12.4 Landscape, Trees and Woodlands

North Downs Special Landscape Area

~~12.4.1 The Kent Structure Plan (policy ENV4) designates the North Downs as a Special Landscape Area (SLA). The boundaries of the small part of the SLA that falls within Dartford Borough are shown on the Proposals Map. The Local Plan affords continuing protection to the SLA through policy C6. Special Landscape Areas are recognised as being of countywide landscape significance due to their scenic quality. Though not the subject of any statutory constraints, within these areas the protection of the natural beauty including landscape character, openness, wildlife and geographical features will receive priority over other planning considerations, though the economic and social well-being of the area will also be taken into account.~~

C6 North Downs Special Landscape Area

Development within the North Downs Special Landscape Area, as shown on the Proposals Map, will only be permitted where it would cause no significant harm to the landscape character of the area.

Areas of Local Landscape Importance

~~12.4.2 Outside the Special Landscape Area, much of the Borough's landscape, although not of strategic significance, has nonetheless a quality and attractiveness which merits recognition and protection. Accordingly four Areas of Local Landscape Importance (ALLIs) are shown on the Proposals Map. These areas include the distinctive features of the Borough's rural landscape such as ridges, valleys and high ground. The four ALLIs are:~~

- ~~(a) Dartford Heath;~~
- ~~(b) Land between Joydens Wood and Wilmington;~~
- ~~(c) Land between Darenth Valley and the Ebbsfleet Valley; and~~
- ~~(d) Dartford Marshes.~~

~~12.4.3 In addition to these areas, the Darent Valley is recognised as a special policy area (see policy C8). Kent County Council has published "Kent Landscape Assessment and Guidelines North West Kent" which sets out the characteristic features and key landscape objectives for the area lying between Kent Thameside the Kent Downs Area of Remaining Natural Beauty. The whole of the rural part of the Borough has~~

~~been assessed as falling within one of five landscape character areas. These landscape assessment and guidelines will be taken into account in determining applications within the rural area which have an impact upon the landscape character of the rural area.~~

C7 Areas of Local Landscape Importance

~~Development within the Areas of Local Landscape Importance that would materially affect the local character of the area and the quality of the landscape will not be permitted. Particular attention should be paid to the design, layout and landscaping of any development and to its boundaries with the open countryside.~~

12.4.1 *There has recently been a move away from a hierarchical approach to landscape analysis, towards character-based assessments. This approach seeks to identify those qualities which typify the landscapes in certain areas. The disadvantage of identifying certain areas as having a superior quality of landscape is the implication that the remaining areas are inferior, and that lower standards should be applied within them. The Countryside Agency and English Nature have analysed the distinctive features of the English countryside, in both landscape and nature conservation terms, and have identified the unique character of different areas. This character is derived from the interaction of physical and ecological characteristics with human activity. Kent County Council published the Thames Gateway and the North West Kent Landscape Assessment and Guidelines, which elaborates on the relevant analyses in greater detail for this area.*

In considering development proposals, the opportunities for preserving and enhancing the positive characteristics of these landscapes will be investigated and pursued.

Most of rural Dartford, south of the A2, is characterised by three different landscape types.

Darenth Downs - *this comprises the gently undulating dip slope of the North Downs. It is for the most part an open arable landscape dissected by major transport routes – the A2, M25 and the Swanley-Chatham railway line. However there are also some valuable areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, notably Darenth Wood and Lords Wood. The area provides attractive southward views to the higher ridge of The Downs, but views northwards are frequently dominated by the ‘raw’ edge of the urban area. Policy DD7 seeks to establish community woodland in the A2 corridor. Other opportunities to soften the landscape and restore broken hedgerows will be sought when considering development proposals.*

Lower Darent Valley - *the River Darent dissects the North Downs ridge, creating a valley with a distinctive and attractive landscape. Flows in the river itself have been restored following over-abstraction, and it is again a fine chalk stream, meandering through a flat flood plain. At Sutton-at-Hone and the area south of Princes Road, gravel extraction has left a series of lakes but these have returned to nature and are used for fishing. Again the area could benefit from hedgerow reinforcement in places. The railway viaduct at Sutton-at-Hone is generally accepted as a positive landscape feature, but the A2 and M25 are more intrusive, and could be improved with more screen planting. Policy C8 applies to this area.*

Southfleet Arable Lands - *this land forms the eastern part of the Borough’s rural area, and again comprises an open undulating arable landscape, interspersed with unkempt hedgerows and copses. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link spur to the existing line at Longfield will create a scar across the landscape until buffer planting becomes*

established. The area north of Southfleet and Betsham is dominated by powerlines and views of Gravesend and Swanscombe. There is scope for more buffer planting to reduce the intrusiveness of the A2 and the conurbation – including proposed development at Ebbsfleet.

Small areas in the east and west extremities of the Borough are covered by the following designations:

Swanley Fringes - *Joydens Wood is a well-managed broadleaf woodland, probably atypical of this character area. However, a caravan site mars the quality of this otherwise attractive area.*

Ash Downs - *this is a pleasant area of well-wooded dry valleys, with narrow country lanes. A small area south of New Barn lies within this area, enjoying attractive southward views.*

Dartford and Gravesend Fringes - *north of the A2, there are a number of open areas, rural in character, which perform an important amenity function:*

Dartford Heath - this is an area of degraded lowland heath, which is being managed and restored with the intention of creating a local nature reserve. The main priorities are the need to control the spread of scrub, fly tipping and unauthorised encampments.

Darent Country Park - this is being managed as a landscaped amenity area.

Darent Woods: Part of this wood lies to the north of the A2. It is a site of Special Scientific Interest and is being managed principally for its nature conservation value.

Western Thames Marshes – *in Dartford, this comprises Dartford Marshes, an area of drained marshland of nature conservation value, principally because of its drainage ditches. It is to be managed as a local nature reserve, but its value could be undermined to some extent by proposals for gravel extraction.*

(see Figure 5 - Landscape Character Areas at the end of the Chapter)

C6 Landscape Character

Development proposals that visually affect the rural area must be designed, and must include planting and other measures, to preserve and enhance the positive aspects of the local landscape character. Those proposals that have an unacceptable visual effect, which cannot be satisfactorily mitigated, will not be permitted.

Darent Valley

12.4.4 The Darent Valley is of particular significance locally, not just for its landscape qualities, but for its relative ease of access, especially with the establishment of the Valley footpath, and its interpretative and educational potential. Improvements to the alignment of the Darent Valley Footpath will be secured where appropriate. The North West Kent Landscape Assessment, referred to above, sets key landscape objectives for the Darent Valley. These are:

- a) enhancing the remaining rural character of the valley by strategic maintenance and replanting of the gappy hedgerows, river's edge trees and tree clumps to contain the suburban villages and the dominant main roads and motorways;

- b) seeking ways of reducing motorway noise without increasing visual intrusion; and
- c) enhancing or restoring the natural floodplain where possible and maintain waterflows.

12.4.5 These objectives will be taken into account in considering planning applications within the Darent Valley, as defined on the Proposals Map, which are likely to have an impact upon the landscape of the Valley.

C8 Darent Valley and Darent Valley Footpath

The Darent Valley and Darent Valley Footpath will be safeguarded, and within the Valley, priority will be given to landscape, nature conservation and recreation factors over other planning considerations. Proposals for development that would adversely affect the landscape, ecology or setting of the Valley or the Darent Valley Footpath will not be permitted.

Trees and Woodlands

12.4.6 Trees and woodlands, including ancient woodlands, are vital elements in the Kent countryside. Ancient woodlands have existed from at least medieval times without ever having been cleared for uses other than wood and timber production. They tend to be richer in wildlife than more recent woods and more uncommon species are associated with them. All woodland, however, adds greatly to the appearance of the landscape, provide a habitat for wildlife, give shelter to animals and provide timber. The quality of existing woodland areas is dependent to a large extent upon good management practices, such as coppicing. Landowners will be encouraged to draw up long term management plans incorporating biodiversity targets. *The Woodland Grant Scheme is the Government's mechanism for grant aid designed to encourage the preparation of longer-term plans.*

12.4.7 The Borough's broad-leaved woodlands are extensive and contain remnants of the ancient woodlands that covered the south of England in the 'Middle Ages'. They are important both as features of the landscape and as wildlife habitats. The following are indicated on the Proposals Map:

- a) Woodland at Greenhithe;
- b) Trolling Down Hill Wood;
- c) Darenth Wood;
- d) Woodland at Watling Street, Bean;
- e) The Thrift;
- f) Stone Wood;
- g) Joydens Wood;
- h) Chalk Wood;
- i) Rowhill Wood and nearby woodlands;
- j) Ladies Wood;
- k) Lords Wood;
- l) Rams Wood;
- m) North of Farningham Wood;
- n) Court Wood.

Trees in conservation areas and those covered by tree preservation orders are protected from felling.

C9 Existing Trees and Woodlands

Proposals that would cause material harm to important woodlands, including ancient woodlands, in the Borough will not be permitted.

12.4.8 Grant Aid is available from the ~~Ministry of Agriculture~~ DEFRA and the Forestry Authority Commission for the afforestation of marginal agricultural land. The Forestry Authority's Commission's 'Woodland Grant Scheme' and 'Community Woodland Supplement' provide a financial incentive towards the provision of such woodlands and to making them available for public enjoyment. Whilst this is to be welcomed in principle, it is important that it does not lead to the establishment of large, commercial coniferous plantations, alien to the local landscape. New woodlands should contain a mix of species, which are mainly broad-leaved and indigenous to the local area. New woodlands that provide links between existing woodland areas will be particularly welcomed. The replacement of storm-damaged trees should also normally be with broad-leaved species. Proposals for the planting of new areas of woodland or for replacement trees will be supported where they contain a mix of native species in character with the local landscape and where nature conservation interests will not be damaged. Proposals for planting in hedgerows, shelter belts and copses will also be supported. Community woodland in the urban fringe is discussed in the Development and Design chapter. Community woodland, linked to essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation in the Green Belt, is discussed below.

Hedgerows

12.4.9 Hedgerows make a significant contribution to the attractive character of the rural areas. Combined with post and wire or similar lightweight fencing, hedgerows can serve as effective boundary fencing providing both screening and security as well as providing wildlife habitats. They are also an important feature of the landscape and countryside and provide a safe haven for flora and fauna. The maintenance and provision of hedgerows is preferable to the introduction of boundary walls or solid fences that tend to present a harsh urban character. The preparation of management plans for the retention, restoration and protection of such hedgerows is therefore important. Important hedgerows are protected under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Landowners will be encouraged to draw up long term management plans for the retention, restoration and protection of hedgerows for wildlife and landscape purposes. Opportunities for the enhancement of the hedgerow network will be supported where this is compatible with the character of the landscape. Landscaping using trees, hedges and copses will also be supported where this is used to screen developments.

12.5 Outdoor Sport and Recreation in the Countryside

12.5.1 The countryside is an important resource, particularly for meeting informal low-key recreational needs. However it is necessary to ensure that recreational activity does not threaten its other qualities and functions, namely:

- its openness and its value in fulfilling Green Belt objectives;
- its landscape quality particularly in special landscape areas and areas of local landscape importance;
- its agricultural value;
- its tranquillity;
- its nature conservation value, particularly in SSSIs, SNCIs and woodlands.

12.5.2 Indeed the enjoyment of the countryside is dependent upon these qualities and incompatible recreational activities will not therefore be permitted. Policy LRT8 sets out criteria for the provision of golf courses.

C10 Outdoor Sport and Recreation

Proposals for outdoor recreational activity in the rural area which would prejudice its Green Belt function, its tranquillity, its landscape, agricultural or nature conservation qualities, will not be permitted.

12.5.3 Essential facilities for recreation in the rural area must be genuinely required for the use proposed. They include small changing rooms, unobstructive spectator accommodation or small stables for outdoor sport and recreation. On large sites, above 2ha in area, there may be scope for the provision of some community woodland which can make a contribution to the Green Grid network.

The woodland must be open to public access but could form part of the landscaped screening of the development, such as a canopy over a car park. The scale of the woodland to be provided will be dependent upon the impact of the facilities on the neighbouring area, the size of the site and the character of surrounding areas.

C11 Facilities for Outdoor Sport and Recreation

Essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation in the rural area will only be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- 1. the proposal must be easily accessible from the transport network;**
- 2. the facilities must be well screened by landscaping from surrounding areas;**
- 3. the proposal must not be unduly obtrusive or give rise to obtrusive car parking;**
- 4. the facilities are appropriate to their function;**
- 5. the proposals do not give rise to the need for further development;**
- 6. the facilities are removed when the recreational use they serve ceases; and**
- 7. on sites of more than 2 ha, the proposal must include an element of community woodland which relates to the Green Grid network and which has unrestricted public access and cycle access where necessary.**

A planning obligation may be sought to ensure appropriate arrangements for the future maintenance and management of the community woodland.

12.6 Nature Conservation

12.6.1 The varied geology and topography of the Borough has produced a wide range of habitats, including those associated with woodlands, hedgerows, river valleys and ponds. The recognised need to safeguard habitats upon which wildlife depends has led to the designation of a range of sites. Structure Plan policies ENV2 and ENV5-6 and their accompanying text establish a hierarchy of protection for nature conservation interest. The Local Plan adopts a similar approach, attaching most importance to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and the National Nature Reserve (NNR), but also recognising the importance of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs). Finally a measure of protection is also afforded to land outside the formally identified areas which may be of some interest but where development needs take precedence. The Local Planning Authority will encourage the management and the improvement of existing wildlife habitats, together with the establishment of new habitats.

12.6.2 *'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan' provides a framework for conserving and enhancing biological diversity within the UK. At the local level, Local Biodiversity Action Plans identify priority habitats and species and those that are characteristic, distinctive, rare or vulnerable. The local BAP also sets out the required actions for effective conservation of these habitats and species. The Kent Biodiversity Action Plan sets out a range of Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans. The Habitat Action Plans relevant to Dartford Borough are those for Woodland and Scrub, Hedgerows, Lowland Farmland, Urban Habitats, Chalk Grassland, Heathland, Grazing Marsh, Reedbeds, Rivers and Streams, Standing Water and Intertidal Mud. The Species Action Plans relevant to Dartford Borough are those for Water Vole, Dormouse, Nightingale, Great-Crested Newt and White-Clawed Crayfish. Development proposals should, where appropriate, include an assessment of BAP issues, and in particular the identification of priority, characteristic, distinctive, rare or vulnerable habitats and species and the measures necessary to effect their conservation.*

C12 Protecting Nature Conservation Interests (Animal or Plant Species) Legally Protected Species

Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect, directly or indirectly, animal or plant species, either on site or in its vicinity, which are protected by law. Where development is permitted on sites where such species are present, the developer will be required to take steps to secure the protection of the species, both during its construction and afterwards.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Swanscombe Skull National Nature Reserve

12.6.3 English Nature has a statutory function to designate and advise upon areas of biological and geological significance and to help safeguard these areas from development and conflicting land uses. Sites of outstanding biological and geological importance are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). English Nature also identifies areas of national importance that are primarily used for nature conservation as National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Five areas in the Borough have been identified as SSSIs and one area as a NNR:

- a) Darenth Wood (SSSI) (including Lords Wood and Ladies Wood);
- b) Bakers Hole (SSSI);
- c) Swanscombe Skull Site (part SSSI, part NNR)
- d) Wansunt Pit (part) (SSSI), and
- e) Farningham Wood (part) (SSSI).

12.6.4 *The sites shown on the Proposals Map are those identified at the time of the publication of the Plan. New SSSIs could be notified (or existing ones denotified) during the lifetime of the Plan. Policy C13 will be applied to any additional sites of which the Council may be notified in the Plan period.*

C13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Swanscombe Skull National Nature Reserve

Development will not be permitted in or adjoining Sites of Special Scientific Interest or the National Nature Reserve, shown on the Proposals Map, unless the proposal would not harm the scientific or nature conservation interest of the area. The cumulative effects of development on SSSIs and NNR will also be taken into account.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

12.6.5 The Kent Wildlife Trust has undertaken a comprehensive survey of the County and has identified other Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) which, although not *always* of ~~SSSI-standard~~ *national importance* are, nonetheless, of sufficient interest as to merit recognition. Those incorporated in the Local Plan are:

- a) Ebbsfleet;
- b) Green Street Green Common;
- c) Dartford Marshes;
- d) Sutton-at-Hone Lakes;
- e) Sutton-at-Hone Churchyard;
- f) Joydens Wood/Chalk Wood;
- g) Dartford Heath;
- h) Rowhill Wood, Wilmington;
- i) Beaconwood Country Park;
- j) Chalk Bank, Longfield;
- k) Land West of Craylands Lane, Swanscombe.

12.6.6 These SNCIs, as indicated on the Proposals Map, *are those identified at the time of the publication of the Plan. New SNCIs could be notified (or existing ones denotified) during the lifetime of the Plan.* SNCIs will be protected by policy C14 and, where appropriate, will be supported by other protective measures such as Tree Preservation Orders and Article 4 Directions.

C14 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest

Proposals for development that would materially harm the nature conservation value of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest shown on the Proposals Map will not be permitted, unless the need for the development overrides the particular interest and no appropriate alternative site is available. Where harm arises adequate compensation or mitigation will be required.

Proposed Local Nature Reserves

12.6.7 The scientific and nature conservation value of SNCIs can be enhanced through their designation as local nature reserves. While the designation does not enjoy the same statutory protection as an SSSI, it does give a strong foundation for the defence of the area against competing land uses and for the management of habitats. The introduction of management plans, the possible availability of grants and the provision of facilities for field study and interpretation can also help in this. The establishment of a reserve at Dartford Marshes covering the same area as the SNCI, is being considered. There is currently a "Managing the Marshes" project in operation for the area, which is run by Groundwork and the University of Greenwich and supported by GlaxoSmithKline and Dartford Borough Council. The Environment Agency is currently supporting the development of a water level management plan, which is important in securing the future of the site. The establishment of a reserve at Ebbsfleet – (partly in Gravesham Borough Council) by the private sector and other agencies and covering the same site as the Ebbsfleet SNCI is also being considered. The "Managing the Marshes" initiative and the North Dartford development initiative may offer the opportunity to move toward formal designation of the potential nature reserve and the Council will pursue this further. Similarly, the proposed development at Ebbsfleet may offer the same opportunity.

C15 Proposed Local Nature Reserves

Land is identified at the following locations for the establishment of local nature reserves:

1. Dartford Marshes to the west of Long Reach Sewage Treatment Works; and
2. Ebbsfleet.

Other Areas of Nature Conservation Value

12.6.8 Outside the areas formally recognised for their scientific and nature conservation value, attention will need to be paid to any such value that other land may have where development is proposed. *Provision should be made for the maintenance and management of wildlife habitats, and regard shall be had to the need to create wildlife corridors. Mitigation and compensation measures should contribute to the objectives of the Kent BAP.* The Council will require ecological surveys to be carried out on sites suspected of being of nature conservation interest. It will also consult appropriately with bodies such as English Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Kent Wildlife Trust.

C16 Other Areas of Nature Conservation Value

Development proposals that may affect nature conservation interests will only be permitted where they make satisfactory provision for the maintenance of wildlife habitats and for the creation of wildlife corridors. Where provision is not possible, adequate compensation or mitigation for the loss of wildlife habitats will be required, which should have regard to the objectives of the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan. Where appropriate, planning conditions will be imposed and/or legal agreements sought to secure the provision and subsequent ~~agreements~~ management, for enhanced or new habitats.

Management Agreements

12.6.9 Whilst the sensitive control of development proposals is essential to prevent a deterioration in the countryside's qualities, equally it is important to enhance its inherent character and to foster its recreational potential. The nature conservation interest of sites, whether formally recognised or not, can be enhanced through management agreements. Private landowners can be encouraged to manage their land so as to protect and improve its nature conservation value through entering into management agreements. Such agreements can impose restrictions on the use of land or require positive management measures to be pursued. This can be achieved by way of a legal undertaking, either associated with a planning permission or involving financial provisions. Where necessary the Council will seek to enter into management agreements with private landowners.

Rural Lanes

12.6.10 Kent possesses a rich heritage of rural lanes that date back to medieval, Roman and pre-historic times. Structure Plan policy ENV13 encourages the protection of rural lanes from changes that might affect their character, and their enhancement. The lanes in Dartford have been studied in the 'Rural Lanes Study for Dartford Borough' produced by Kent County Council and Dartford Borough Council. The rural lanes contribute to nature conservation and recreation and to the distinctive character of the countryside, as well as having historic value. The rural lanes in Dartford, whilst experiencing increases in traffic, generally retain their character. The

rural character of these lanes includes hedgerows, banks, verges and other natural features that contribute to the local scene. The Country Lanes West Kent Project has been established to make rural lanes more pleasant and safe for walking, cycling and horse riding. ~~The project will introduce traffic management measures where appropriate and encourage alternatives to car travel in country lanes.~~ *This initiative is a partnership between the Countryside Agency, Kent County Council, the West Kent local authorities (Dartford, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells) and the National Trust. It has four key objectives:*

- *conservation and enhancement*
- *innovative sustainable alternatives and access*
- *reduce the need to travel*
- *attitude change*

The Borough Council will support the Country Lanes West Kent Project to achieve its four key objectives throughout the rural areas of the Borough.

C17 Rural Lanes

Development proposals which are likely to give rise to changes to traffic flow and changes to the type of traffic on rural lanes will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- 1. there is no material harm to the landscape, amenity, nature conservation, historic or archaeological value of the rural lane;**
- 2. the proposal would not require modification of the carriageway to incorporate vision splays, junctions, and widened access roads which would detract from the existing rural character of the lane;**
- 3. the likely changes would not significantly add to erosion of the edges of the rural lane;**
- 4. the proposal would not lead to changes to surface treatment or the introduction of urban features including lighting and footways;**
- 5. the changes would not lead to potential conflicts between users, including pedestrians and cyclists, especially if Heavy Goods Vehicles might be encouraged to use the rural lane;**
- 6. the proposal would have no effect on the safety and amenity of local residents and visitors;**
- 7. the changes would include the use of appropriate highway signing;**
- 8. the proposal includes hard and soft landscaping which can mitigate any visual harm.**

~~Proposals that are likely to give rise to harm against any of these criteria will not be permitted.~~

12.7 Built development in the Villages

Housing

12.7.1 In rural Kent, Structure Plan policy (RS2) generally restricts new residential development to minor development or redevelopment within the confines of the small rural towns or villages, excluding hamlets. Policy C18 applies this broad approach to the Borough, but makes allowance for the fact that some of the village housing opportunities are more than 'minor', as defined - the Structure Plan also makes provision for this. It should be noted that policy C18 relates to the application of Structure Plan policies only, and that there are other settlements in the Borough, which are villages in their own right, such as Wilmington and Joydens Wood.

C18 Settlements Identified as Villages

The settlements listed below and defined on the Proposals Map are identified as 'villages' for the purposes of Structure Plan policies:

- (a) Bean;
- (b) Betsham;
- (c) Green Street Green;
- (d) Hawley;
- (e) Lane End;
- (f) Longfield;
- (g) Longfield Hill;
- (h) New Barn;
- (i) Old Rectory Estate, Sutton-at-Hone;
- (j) Southfleet; and
- (k) Sutton-at-Hone.

New residential development in these villages will be restricted to minor development* or redevelopment within their confines, ~~other than at the sites listed below and identified on the Proposals Map (included in policy H1):~~

- ~~(a) Bean – Shellbank Lane and North of Page Close~~
- ~~(b) Lane End – Bennett Way~~
- ~~(c) Longfield Hill – Orchard Cottage~~

* Minor development, as defined in the Kent Structure Plan, is the completion of an otherwise substantially built-up frontage by the filling of a narrow gap capable usually of taking one or two dwellings only.

12.7.2 The affordability of housing in rural areas has emerged as an important issue. Government has encouraged authorities to look at making exceptions to their normal development control policies to facilitate low-cost housing, although not in Green Belt areas since they are close to the main conurbations and are not typical of rural areas in general to which this approach is addressed. Proposals for housing development in the villages should pay due regard to local housing needs and incorporate dwellings of an appropriate size and type. Housing Policy H17 deals with the provision of affordable housing in the rural area.

12.7.3 It is especially important that new housing development in all the Borough's villages respects the character of the existing settlements and their rural context. An insensitive design approach on a village housing site can have a disproportionately harmful impact on the wider environment. Sites at the village edge should incorporate appropriate substantial landscaping and be developed at a density that reflects their rural location. Policy C19 establishes an appropriate policy for considering proposals for housing sites at the periphery of villages.

C19 Housing Development in Villages

Proposals for housing development in villages should be of a high standard of design, complementary to the character of the village, accessible to good public transport services and be appropriate in terms of location, built form, scale, density, layout and materials. Proposals should incorporate landscaping appropriate to the characteristics and setting of the site including screen planting on sites abutting the

open countryside. Sites on the edges of villages should be developed at densities that will provide a transition between the built-up area and the open countryside.

Employment

12.7.4 Notwithstanding the relative proximity of Dartford's villages to employment in the urban areas, local businesses can provide a useful, additional source of employment especially for the less mobile. Proposals for small-scale businesses will be considered against the criteria set out in policy C20.

C20 Small-Scale Business Uses in Villages

Proposals for small-scale business uses in villages will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:

- 1. the nature and character of the proposed use and buildings is appropriate to a village location and the scale of the settlement;**
- 2. no material adverse impact on the character and amenity of the village or its setting, or on adjoining properties and residents;**
- 3. high quality design of buildings and good landscaping;**
- 4. no significant increase in vehicular movements likely to be generated by the proposal;**
- 5. good public transport links, walking and cycling access;**
- 6. the proposed use will not harm the local environment through the creation of noise, dust, smoke, fumes, grit, vibration or any form of water, soil or air pollution; and**
- 7. the cumulative effects of both existing and permitted uses within the vicinity would not result in a material impact on traffic, parking and residential amenity in the local area.**

Local Facilities

12.7.5 Local shopping and community facilities are an important ingredient of village life. Proposals for new shopping and community facilities in villages will be permitted, where they meet local needs, are in character with the village and do not impact on neighbouring properties and residents (see also policy R4).

C21 Shopping and Community Facilities in Villages

Proposals within villages for shopping and community facilities of a scale to serve local needs will be permitted, subject to the proposals being in character within the village and not giving rise to material adverse impact on neighbouring properties and residents.

Appendix 16 – Criteria for Use of Land for Horses or for Stables and Related Facilities (Policy C3)

- A1.1 The situation regarding the need for planning permission has been clarified in Annex F of PPG7 - 'The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development'. It is clear that a full planning application is required for the use of land for keeping horses for non-agricultural purposes and for buildings to stable them unless the operational development can qualify as Permitted Development under Part 1 Class E of the General Permitted Development Order. (Class E relates to the provision within the curtilage of a dwelling house of a building or enclosure required for a purpose incidental to the enjoyment of that dwelling house which includes the keeping of livestock).
- A1.2 Proposals for stables relating to the grazing of horses for domestic purposes that require planning permission may be appropriate development within the Green Belt, particularly if the stable can be regarded as a limited extension to an existing dwelling. Otherwise they would need to be able to be considered as "essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation", that is, to be "small stables for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation".
- A1.3 Where planning permission is required, proposals will be judged against the following principles.

Stables

- a) The stable should not exceed 13.4 sq. m with no more than 4 stables per site. [The British Horse Society recommends an area of between 3 x 3.7m and 3.7 x 3.7m and a height of between 2.7 and 3.4m according to the size of the horse].
- b) Any associated structures such as tack rooms, food/bedding stores and manure bays should be appropriate to the scale of the stable(s) and should not exceed 22 sq. m.
- c) The stable(s) and associated structures *and vehicle parking areas* (see (ii) above) should be sited to minimise visual intrusion and should be at least 30m from any unrelated residential building and the land set aside for horses should be at least 21m from any unrelated residential building.
- d) ~~The building(s) should be of a good standard of design and construction~~ *The buildings should be of a design and construction appropriate to their use as stables* and should be sited so as to blend into the surroundings. Detailed consideration must be given to materials, landscaping and siting or grouping of buildings, that is, near to agricultural buildings.

Horses and Grazing

- a) A minimum of 0.4ha per horse should be available for grazing fenced off from a separate area for exercise. Management proposals that demonstrate measures to prevent the possible erosion and decline of good vegetation on the land will be required.
- b) There should be sufficient land available for the exercise of the horse(s) and there is safe convenient access to it from the site.

Sensitive Locations

Proposals in sensitive areas should make a positive contribution to the landscape.

Fencing and Hedges

- a) The proposed means of enclosure should be sympathetic to the character of the adjoining countryside. Whilst boundaries must be stock proof, the Local Planning Authority would not wish to see the introduction of harsh fencing and would expect suitable hedge boundary treatment (if necessary in addition to stock proofing). Attention should be paid to the design and siting of any supplementary fencing necessary to protect and maintain existing or newly planted hedgerow/tree boundaries from browsing.
- b) The stable(s) and related area(s) available to the horse(s) should be satisfactorily screened.

Drainage

- a) Certain parts of the Borough are particularly sensitive to pollution of ground water, depending upon various factors such as the underlying geology and the proximity of boreholes supplying water. In any such sensitive area it is essential for stables to be connected to a main drainage system (*subject to the agreement of Thames Water*) or cesspool. The Council will be guided by the advice of the Environment Agency in this respect. The drainage system should be fitted with suitable screening devices that will prevent the drainage system from becoming blocked by hay and straw.
- b) The erection of stables without the provision for an effective system of foul drainage may be permitted when ALL of the following criteria apply:
 - The stable would be situated in a predominantly rural area and sited sufficiently remote from other premises.
 - The Environment Agency considers that there is no risk of pollution to ground water.
 - The absence of a foul drainage system would not be prejudicial to health or likely to give rise to nuisance to persons occupying adjoining premises and land.
- c) Erection of stables will only be permitted if provision for foul drainage meets the requirements of the Local Planning Authority as outlined above.

Stable Management

- a) The layout of the stables should include details of an area appropriately designed and sited for the reception of soiled bedding material.
- b) Burning of waste will not normally be acceptable.
- c) Planning permissions granted for the erection of stables in proximity to residential properties may be on a temporary basis in order to assess the effects of the development on the area. The renewal of such permissions will depend upon whether nuisances have been experienced by neighbours.

Access and Parking

- a) The access to the stable(s) must allow for vehicular movements to and from the site without causing harm to the free flow of traffic or to road safety.
- b) The provision of parking to the following ~~minimum~~ standards:
 - Horse keeping without stables: one surfaced space off the highway.
 - Non-commercial stables: one space per loose box.
 - Commercial units will be assessed individually.

Riding Facilities

The keeping or stabling of horses will only be allowed where there is access to bridleways or suitable riding facilities within a reasonable distance off the highway, such as a large paddock.

- A1.4 In cases where planning permission is not required, the Local Planning Authority will, nevertheless, encourage development in accordance with the foregoing principles.

