

## *Chapter 6*

# **Countryside and the Rural Economy**

## **Introduction**

- 6.1 This chapter combines the separate chapters of “Countryside” and “Rural Community and Economy” contained in the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No.1.
- 6.2 The Babergh District contains:
- parts of two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
  - extensive Special Landscape Areas;
  - large tracts of high quality agricultural land;
  - major parts of the Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Area;
  - a wealth of important natural habitats; and
  - a rich heritage of historic buildings, especially farm buildings, and archaeological features.
- 6.3 The Babergh countryside has undergone rapid change in recent decades and is under threat from a number of sources such as:
- continued changes in farming practices and management;
  - new and existing development;
  - visitor pressure and traffic generation; and
  - lack of appropriate management.
- 6.4 There has been a long-term decline in agriculture and related employment. In most rural communities, the number of such job opportunities are few and continue to decline. Tourism can create jobs and contribute to the economy.
- 6.5 There is a shortage of low-cost housing and this particularly affects young and elderly people. Many settlements have an elderly age structure. Some people suffer because public transport giving access to work and services is poor or non-existent. Public services continue to decline and disappear. In some communities the last local shop has closed leaving no source of basic provisions.
- 6.6 Government initiatives have been introduced to try to stimulate the rural economy in the light of agricultural surpluses, reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and declining agricultural employment.

- 6.7 One of the main issues facing the District Council is to protect the character of the countryside while still allowing diversification in the rural economy.
- 6.8 This chapter contains many new policies reflecting recent changes to Planning Policy Guidance and Government and European legislation. It also seeks to bring the Local Plan up to date with Best Practice Advice.

## Objectives

1. To protect and, where possible, enhance the countryside, taking account of its natural beauty and features of archaeological or historic interest.
2. To make the countryside more accessible to the public, where this is consistent with the need to protect agricultural land and areas of wildlife importance.
3. To provide housing to meet local needs through the application of the Local Plan housing policies and the District Council's role as an enabler in housing provision.
4. To encourage the rural economy through the diversification and sensible re-use or conversion of rural buildings.
5. To encourage new initiatives for rural enterprises.
6. To encourage a community-based approach to rural problems.

## Policy Context

- 6.9 Government guidance to local authorities in recent years has given increasing weight to the need to protect the natural environment, in terms of the quality of the landscape, and the conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats and species (biodiversity). Such guidance also recognises the need to sustain the character and diversity of the countryside and to promote diversification of traditional rural economies.
- 6.10 PPG12: Development Plans emphasises the role of the planning system, and particularly plans such as this one, in ensuring that development and growth are sustainable and that environmental issues and priorities are taken into account. The new PPS12: Local Development Frameworks reaffirms this message.
- 6.11 PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, are of particular importance in providing Government guidance relevant to this chapter.

6.12 Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia (RPG6) makes it clear that all important aspects of the countryside, including individual features, special sites and the wider landscape, should be protected for their own sake. It states that Development Plans should include policies consistent with sustainable development principles which:

- build on the strengths of rural areas by encouraging business development;
- support the expansion and establishment of businesses that can undertake much of their activity using information technology;
- promote farm diversification appropriate to the environmental and ecological setting, in particular, uses that support the local economy through increased employment;
- support the viability of rural communities by promoting housing schemes for local needs and the retention of village shops and services;
- protect the countryside from inappropriate development, with priority going to areas that are designated as nationally important; and
- protect and enhance local identity and distinctiveness by promoting patterns of development and designs that draw on local features of importance, and respect landscape character and setting.

6.13 The Suffolk Structure Plan 2001 outlines a number of aims concerned with guiding new development and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscape, biodiversity and high-grade agricultural land.

6.14 In general, the approach adopted by the District Council towards rural areas is:

- to co-ordinate policies at the local level;
- to promote economic development, tourism and other rural enterprises which are acceptable in planning terms;
- to encourage self-help and voluntary schemes;
- to safeguard public facilities; and
- to create a strong rural economy.

6.15 The high quality of the English landscape is one of our most precious national assets. It results from the way different components of the environment – physical, biological and social – interact and are perceived. Landscape character, as a combination of all these components, gives identity and a sense of place to our surroundings.

6.16 The work of Natural England and others (in relation to Countryside Character Areas and Natural Areas) demonstrates that landscape character assessment is a useful tool which can help to:

## Landscape Quality

- identify and understand what environmental features are present in a locality;
- monitor change in the environment;
- understand a location's sensitivity to development and change; and
- inform the nature and conditions for any development change.

6.17 The District Council has produced a Babergh Countryside Strategy and is finalising a Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme for the Babergh District. These will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents and will be used to help assess development proposals in terms of their effect on landscape character.

**CR01** The landscape quality and character of the countryside will be protected by restricting development to that which is essential for the efficient operation of agriculture, forestry and horticulture and for appropriate outdoor recreation. In particular, development such as filling stations, hotels, indoor sports facilities, catering establishments, garden centres and sales areas will not be permitted in the countryside. Where development is allowed in the countryside it must :

- be of a scale compatible with its surroundings and have due regard to the landscape characteristics and cultural heritage of the locality;
- be sensitively designed with high standards of landscaping, layout and careful choice of materials to minimise impact;
- consider measures that will maximise the potential for wildlife on the site and adjacent areas;
- not introduce a proliferation of buildings and structures; and
- be well related to the highway network, including where possible, pedestrian links, cycle routes and public transport, and be acceptable in terms of road safety.

## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 6.18 Parts of the Dedham Vale and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lie in the Babergh District. These designations indicate national recognition of the landscape quality on a par with National Parks. Protection of these designated landscapes will be of prime importance. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, when carrying out their function in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. The CROW Act also places a duty on local authorities, acting jointly with other authorities where appropriate, to prepare and publish a plan which formulates their policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of their function in relation to it. This task has been undertaken by the relevant Partnerships to produce the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley, and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Strategies respectively. In implementing the policies of the Local Plan, the Council will also seek to implement relevant parts of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley, and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Strategies and Action Plans and will resist development that would conflict with these aims and objectives.

**CR02** The landscape of the Dedham Vale and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be safeguarded through the strict control of development. Unless there is an overriding national need for development having a significant impact in the particular location and no alternative site is available, such developments will not be allowed. Due regard will be given to the provisions contained within the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley, and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Strategies.

- 6.19 The provision of public utility services may necessitate the construction of buildings and other installations, often of a large scale such as grid lines and water towers. If it is necessary to site these in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, care should be taken to minimise their impact.

- 6.20 Many statutory undertakers and utility providers enjoy permitted development rights, which means that certain types of development required in connection with the particular utility may be erected without the need for a specific planning permission. This may include, for example, certain types of telecommunications developments (see Chapter 2). Where they may have a significant adverse impact on an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty the District Council will consider whether such permitted development rights should be withdrawn, either by the use of conditions attached to planning permissions, or serving an Article 4 Direction under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). The needs and statutory responsibilities of the utility provider will be taken into account.

**CR03** In considering proposals by statutory undertakers and utility providers for buildings and installations in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particular attention will be paid to siting, design and landscaping. Major utilities and overhead power lines will be discouraged in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Special Landscape Areas

- 6.21 In the Babergh District there are other areas with particular landscape qualities which also require special consideration, and these are defined as Special Landscape Areas. Until recently, these Special Landscape Areas were defined through the Suffolk Structure Plan. However, the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001 makes it clear that these are now to be defined through local plans. The Babergh Local Plan will therefore provide the policy basis for the protection of Special Landscape Areas.
- 6.22 Protection of the Special Landscape Areas will continue to be of great importance. Similar consideration is needed as in AONBs for development by statutory undertakers and utility providers. The boundaries of the Special Landscape Areas in the Babergh District tend to relate to river valleys and have been drawn to follow physical features on the ground, e.g. roads, hedgerows etc.
- 6.23 New Special Landscape Areas at Dodnash and in the Gipping Valley, around Sproughton and Burstall, have been defined, as has an extension to the Stour Valley Special Landscape Area in Great Cornard. The Babergh District Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme will be used to help determine whether or not planning permission should be granted for development in the Special Landscape Areas. Where development is permitted, the provisions of Policy CR01 will be rigorously applied.

**CR04** Development proposals in Special Landscape Areas will only be permitted where they:

- maintain or enhance the special landscape qualities of the area, identified in the relevant landscape appraisal; and
- are designed and sited so as to harmonise with the landscape setting.

6.24 The following locations are defined as Special Landscape Areas:

- the Stour Valley from Long Melford to the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- an area south of Bury St Edmunds;
- the valleys of the rivers Glem, Box, Brett and Chad Brook;
- the Dodnash area;
- parts of the Gipping Valley and areas to the west of it; and
- the historic parklands of Melford Hall, Kentwell Hall and the former Tendring Hall.

**CR05** In considering proposals by statutory undertakers and utility providers for buildings and other installations in Special Landscape Areas, particular regard will be paid to siting, design and landscaping. Major utilities and power lines will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated that they do not have a significant detrimental effect on the landscape characteristics of the Special Landscape Area.

6.25 The landscape can be spoilt by the quality and quantity of signs and advertisements, particularly those which are illuminated. This is considered in Chapter 2 (Policy EN23 refers). However, signs are also found outside the built-up areas of towns and villages, particularly those giving advance directions to business premises. Such signs require careful control to avoid damaging the landscape and character of rural areas.

## Signs and Advertisements

**CR06** Where express consent is required for the display of advertisements, consent will not be granted for signs and advertisements which, by reason of their number, siting, appearance or illumination would be to the detriment of the landscape, or are likely to be a distraction to motorists.

## Mineral Extraction

- 6.26 Policies relating to the extraction of minerals are contained in the Suffolk Structure Plan 2001 and the Suffolk Minerals Local Plan 1999. Suffolk County Council is the Local Planning Authority in respect of determining such planning applications and is currently reviewing the Plan through preparation of the Minerals and Waste Development Framework.

## Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

- 6.27 Trees, woodlands and hedgerows are particularly important features in the open countryside and form an essential component of most landscapes. Trees can also add to the quality of the built environment of towns and villages. Their retention and management can often be secured by way of formal and informal management agreements or, if appropriate, by conditions attached to planning permissions. The District Council has the power to make Tree Preservation Orders on woodlands, areas or groups of trees or individual specimens, which are a significant part of the landscape or are of intrinsic value.
- 6.28 The District Council will make a Tree Preservation Order where trees which contribute to the amenity of an area may be under threat. This may arise from:
- specific development proposals;
  - a site being allocated for development in the Local Plan; or
  - actions of owners who want to increase operational efficiency on a site, fear damage to their property, or regard the trees as a nuisance.
- 6.29 Tree Preservation Orders will be made where an important tree or trees are threatened by proposed development, or by the actions of landowners. Where a site is allocated for development in the Local Plan, or is the subject of a planning application, and has an important tree or trees which should be protected, a Tree Preservation Order will be made.
- 6.30 Most established woodlands in the Babergh District are already protected by Tree Preservation Orders, or under the Forestry Acts. Usually the District Council does not need to take action to protect woodlands that are not already protected by Tree Preservation Orders, given the strict controls exercised by the Forestry Commission. However, circumstances may arise where a Tree Preservation Order is the appropriate way to protect threatened woodland.

- 6.31 The District Council will also consider the impact of development on the setting of a woodland, where its value as a landscape feature or as a wildlife habitat could be compromised by allowing development to take place nearby. In the case of ancient semi- natural woodlands, the District Council is obliged to consult the Forestry Commission if a proposal affects a woodland site, either directly or within 500 metres of the woodland boundary.
- 6.32 Woodlands will be protected and their good management encouraged. This can include the use of Tree Preservation Orders, legal agreements associated with granting planning permission, or consultation with the Forestry Commission.
- 6.33 An important issue in the protection of the Babergh countryside is to ensure that new planting and landscaping schemes, which arise as a result of development being granted planning permission, pay appropriate regard to the location. In this context, the Babergh District Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme will advise on the kind of landscaping that is likely to be most appropriate. Particular emphasis will be given to incorporating indigenous species and discouraging the introduction of exotic trees and shrubs.
- 6.34 Planting new woodlands will continue to be encouraged where this would benefit the landscape and wildlife. The Babergh Countryside Strategy considers the more detailed means by which the District Council can assist in the planting of new woodlands.

**CR07** If planning permission is granted for development in the countryside, a high standard of landscaping will be required. This must reflect the characteristics of the locality; use indigenous species; and avoid exotic trees or shrubs. Where possible, new planting must link with existing features to provide wildlife “corridors” and may also involve creating woodland in appropriate circumstances.

- 6.35 The District Council fully supports schemes for tree planting except those which:
- consist on the whole of non-indigenous species;
  - take place on marginal land to the detriment of the landscape and wildlife; or
  - do not accord with the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme.

- 6.36 Much hedgerow cover has been lost in the Babergh District since the end of the Second World War. Similar losses have occurred throughout East Anglia, largely as a result of modern farming practices. The District Council will use all its powers to try to stem the flow of hedgerow removal, and to encourage the replanting of hedgerows where appropriate.
- 6.37 Many hedgerows are ancient in origin and are species-rich. These are identified in the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan 1998 as key habitats for protection.
- 6.38 Hedgerows are often important features on development sites, and their long-term retention is essential. This can be achieved in several ways, such as making them conditions of planning permission; using a Planning Obligation; or as part of an approved landscaping scheme. However, for the retention of such hedgerows to be truly successful, they need to be brought into public ownership. In such cases, the District Council will seek to acquire the hedgerow, together with an appropriate sum of money for its future maintenance. This would be pursued via a Planning Obligation. It is essential that appropriate, permanent access to both sides of the hedgerow is secured for maintenance purposes.

**CR08** Where development proposals affect hedgerows of amenity or landscape significance, planning permission will only be granted where:

- hedgerows are retained in full, or
- suitable mitigation such as replacement planting and management programmes are proposed.

- 6.39 Under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 there is a general presumption in favour of the retention of important hedgerows, unless assessment of the proposal shows that its loss would be acceptable measured against its importance.

## Agriculture

- 6.40 Agriculture is still the predominant user of land in the Babergh District and of major economic importance. Much of the land is of high agricultural value, being Grades 1, 2 and 3a. The need to minimise the permanent loss of good quality agricultural land is recognised, as it is for some farming enterprises to diversify.
- 6.41 Modern farming methods often require large, almost factory-like, buildings. Such buildings can have a very significant impact on the character of the landscape. The District Council does not wish to hinder the development and expansion of the agricultural industry, but will seek to balance the needs of agriculture against the need to protect the environment.

6.42 There has been a growing demand by farmers for agricultural reservoirs and other winter water storage facilities. This demand will probably result in an increase in the number of planning applications for such developments, particularly in the light of apparent climate change. Such developments usually amount to large engineering projects that can have a significant adverse impact on the environment. The District Council will generally support such development proposals, subject to there being no material adverse environmental impacts. Proposals will be judged in relation to the requirements of Policy CR01, and any adverse effect on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries European Marine Site, and against the following specific new policy.

**CR09** Proposals for agricultural reservoirs and/or winter water storage facilities will be permitted where proposals have no material adverse impacts on:

- landscape characteristics;
- biodiversity;
- cultural heritage;
- public rights of way;
- floodplain and associated flood storage;
- the Stour and Orwell Estuaries European Marine Site; and
- public safety.

Planning permission will be granted only if the proposed development is considered to satisfy all the above criteria. A high standard of landscaping, both on and off site, that reflects the characteristics of the locality; uses indigenous species; avoids exotic trees and shrubs; and complies with the Babergh District Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme will be required.

6.43 In relation to reservoirs having an effect on the character of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, the views of the Environment Agency and Natural England will be sought. Projects that involve water abstraction such as reservoir storage and irrigation may be subject, depending on the scale of the project and the sensitivity of the environment affected, to the environmental assessment regulations for water management projects. The Environment Agency and Natural England will be consulted on the need for an Environmental Assessment. The development must also be designed to maximise opportunities to create wildlife habitats. If new habitats are created, measures will be put in place to ensure suitable management in perpetuity.

## Change of Use from Agricultural Land to Domestic Gardens

- 6.44 Proposals to extend domestic gardens, by the change of use of areas of adjoining agricultural land, have become increasingly common. While the number of applications has grown, the areas of land involved have also significantly increased in size. In considering such proposals important aims are the need to retain the unique character of the Babergh countryside and to protect the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land ie, Grades 1-3a, in the interests of sustainable development and in preserving land for agricultural use through the strict control of development. The impact of such a change is likely to be unacceptable, in some instances, for example where it adversely affects the landscape characteristics of the locality due to inappropriate landscaping and/or the large- scale nature of the proposal. In such instances, planning permission will be refused. The District Council may permit proposals that might be considered excessive in scale if a strong case is put forward. Proposals that incorporate sensitive landscaping may also be acceptable. In appropriate circumstances protection of the landscape can be achieved by removing permitted development rights under Article 3, Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 – as amended, or any Order revoking or re-enacting that Order, thereby requiring a further planning permission to erect outbuildings, fences, walls with or without modifications, or other structures on the land.
- 6.45 In applying Policy CR10, the relationship of land to a defined Built Up Area Boundary of a Town or Village will be taken into account. Proposals that are clearly outside these boundaries and in the open countryside are unacceptable in principle, unless the effect on landscape and Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land is negligible because the proposal is small in scale. Conversion of land incapable of current or future agricultural use may be acceptable in principle, but not if it threatens the viability of farm holdings.
- 6.46 The Babergh Landscape Character Assessment and Action Programme will provide the detailed guidance for assessing the landscape impact of such proposals. It will also help to secure high quality planting schemes, taking into consideration the landscape characteristics of the locality. In some cases, proposals to extend domestic curtilages may provide the opportunity to enable improvements to rural locations, through the use of appropriate landscaping.

**CR10** Proposals for change of use from agricultural land to domestic gardens will not be permitted where:

- the scale of the proposal would have an adverse impact on the landscape characteristics and biodiversity of the locality;

- it would result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land;
- the site intrudes into the open countryside; and
- it threatens the viability of farm holdings due to the breaking up of agricultural land.

Where permission is granted, the proposed landscaping and boundary treatment must achieve a rural rather than suburban character.

6.47 The District Council intends to protect the Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land from development.

**CR11** Development of greenfield land, including Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land will only be permitted where opportunities have been assessed for accommodating development on previously developed sites or within existing urban boundaries. Where development of agricultural land is unavoidable, development should seek to use areas of poorer quality except where other sustainability considerations suggest otherwise.

6.48 Although Structure and Local Plan policies generally resist new dwellings in the countryside, the District Council acknowledges that there may be instances where agricultural workers require accommodation close to their enterprises for husbandry, security and other reasons. If applicants demonstrate a genuine overriding need for a new dwelling in the countryside associated with their agricultural enterprise, the District Council may grant planning permission. Since such an approach is a departure from restrictive countryside policy, the planning permission will be subject to a condition restricting occupation of the dwelling.

## **Agricultural Workers' Dwellings**

**CR12** In the countryside, dwellings for key agricultural personnel will be permitted only if it can be demonstrated that there is a proven essential and immediate agricultural need for a dwelling to be built on the holding.

- 6.49 If it can be demonstrated that it is essential for an agricultural worker's dwelling to be located in the countryside, the dwelling must be sited near existing farm buildings to minimise the impact on the landscape. If agricultural workers' dwellings are permitted, the District Council will reduce the standard time limit for the term of the permission and an occupancy restriction condition will be imposed.
- 6.50 When considering applications for new dwellings associated with an agricultural enterprise in the countryside, the following matters will be taken into account:
- planning permission will not be granted for a new dwelling outside the defined built-up areas of settlements, except where an overriding agricultural need is clearly proven to be essential (rather than merely convenient) to the efficient operation of the farming enterprise;
  - the enterprise should be wholly able to support the occupant in full-time work;
  - applications for such dwellings must be accompanied by a detailed agricultural appraisal to justify the new dwelling;
  - planning permission will not be granted where dwellings associated with the holding, but not subject to restriction, have been separately sold off; and
  - the scale of the proposed dwelling and the accommodation needs of the agricultural worker who will occupy the dwelling.
- 6.51 All these factors are important when considering proposals for agricultural dwellings since it is essential that all applications are scrutinised thoroughly. The aim is to detect attempts to abuse the concession that the planning system makes for such dwellings. These factors follow the advice contained in PPS7, where the District Council is advised to consider using functional and financial tests to assess proposals for new agricultural dwellings.
- 6.52 Planning permission will only be granted for an agricultural dwelling in the countryside as an exception to adopted Settlement Planning Policy, and where it has been clearly demonstrated that there is an overriding agricultural need for the dwelling on that holding. It follows, therefore, that an agricultural occupancy condition will only be discharged where it has been clearly demonstrated, to the District Council's satisfaction, that there is no longer a need for an agricultural dwelling on the holding; nor that there is any demand locally by others who could satisfy the agricultural occupancy condition.

**CR13** If an applicant seeks to remove the agricultural occupancy restrictions imposed by a condition of planning permission, the following provisions will apply:

- a) The application must be accompanied by a full statement of the circumstances that have given rise to the application, including:
  - the change in the nature of the holding since the original grant of planning permission which, for one reason or another, means that the dwelling is no longer required for an agricultural worker;
  - evidence that the dwelling is not required by anyone else in the locality who could satisfy the requirements of the agricultural occupancy condition; and
  - evidence that long-term needs do not exist, on the agricultural holding or in the locality, which warrant the retention of the dwelling for the purposes for which it was originally granted planning permission.
- b) The dwelling that is the subject of the application must have been offered for sale on the open market for at least six months at a price that reflects the agricultural occupancy condition and the limited market.

The statement must also detail the steps that have been taken to sell the dwelling, (advertising etc.). In addition there must be a statement signed by a qualified valuer that the asking price reflects the effect of the condition, and the price that would have been asked if the requirements of the condition had not been applied. The asking price must also be verified by an independent valuer.

6.53 Houseboats, like permanent dwellings, require services (electricity, water, drainage); because of their isolated location, these services can be difficult or expensive to provide. Houseboats, if not well maintained, can be unattractive intrusions into the countryside, as can the associated land-based developments, such as car parking. Allowing one houseboat could lead to the mooring of others adjacent to it.

## Houseboats

**CR14** Planning permission will not be granted for houseboats or vessels converted for residential use on estuarial or inland waters.

- 6.54 There are a number of occupied vessels moored off Pin Mill Cliff, some of which have become lawful as a result of acquiring established use rights through the passage of time.
- 6.55 The mooring of traditional vessels at Pin Mill is part of the character and heritage of the area. It is considered that the numbers and type of vessels need to be controlled, given the location in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the pressure on shore based facilities.

**CR15** An area for the mooring of houseboats is shown on the Proposals Map at Pin Mill. Outside this area, the mooring of houseboats will not be permitted. Planning permission will only be granted for a houseboat at Pin Mill if it meets the following criteria:

- it lies within the area defined on the Proposals Map;
- the total number of houseboats within the area does not rise above 28;
- the houseboat appearance is that of a traditional form of vessel in terms of both the hull and superstructure;
- the vessel is completely riverworthy (capable of floating and being moved) and restored to a high standard complementary to the location within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- it is between approximately 6 and 36 metres (20 and 120 feet) in length; and
- access to it is gained by a jetty and the houseboat to be secured to the jetty or a mooring post.

- 6.56 In relation to the form of vessels it is considered that traditional types with a distinctive character, such as barges and lighters are acceptable. Vessels formed of pontoons, white fibreglass hulled yachts and catamarans are not part of this traditional character and will be refused planning permission. The superstructure to vessels should also have a nautical character i.e. features such as shape, massing and detailing which would be recognisable as a feature of a boat rather than a terrestrial residential property and be in proportion with the hull supporting them. Materials should be predominantly wood and/or steel. Portacabins, mobile homes or caravans and structures which resemble these types of accommodation will not be acceptable. In order to retain planning control over the appearance of houseboats for which planning permission is granted permitted development rights will be removed.

6.57 The land-based developments associated with houseboats at Pin Mill also need to be carefully controlled to ensure that they do not have a material adverse impact on this sensitive environment.

**CR16** Planning permission for a new or replacement jetty to serve boats in the area identified for houseboats at Pin Mill, will be granted if:

- the total number of jetties serving the area does not exceed 17;
- it is mainly constructed from wood;
- it is no greater in size than is sufficient to gain safe access to the houseboats; and
- any security measure to prevent unauthorised access to the jetty is in the form of a simple gate matching the jetty construction.

Planning permission for storage buildings on jetties at Pin Mill will be granted, so long as they are:

- a maximum of 2.5 metres in height;
- a maximum of 5.5 cubic metres in volume;
- mainly of wooden construction; and
- in keeping with their surroundings.

Planning permission will not be granted for any structures on land adjacent to the area identified for houseboats at Pin Mill, except in the case of proposals necessary for delivering utility services or to act as mooring posts.

6.58 For several years there have been significant changes in agriculture and other rural-based employment. National and international agricultural policy is also having repercussions on the use of agricultural land. The Government recognises that there is a need to foster the diversification of the rural economy so as to widen and vary employment opportunities. Clear advice on this aspect is set out in PPS7. In addition, Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia (RPG6) seeks to promote farm diversification that is appropriate to the environmental and ecological setting, in particular, uses that support the local economy through increased employment. This policy guidance will be replaced by the Regional Spatial Strategy: The East of England Plan.

6.59 Scale will always be a most important consideration in terms of impact on the landscape, on residential amenity and on traffic generation. Residential use of agricultural land and buildings will be considered against the Settlement Policy (Chapter 3) and policies later in this chapter.

## Farm Diversification

- 6.60 Diversification which still relates to agriculture, e.g. organic produce, rare breeds, 'pick-your-own', etc., unless substantial new buildings are constructed, does not usually require planning permission and, therefore, is not subject to specific policies in this Plan.
- 6.61 Other activities which involve a material change of use of land and buildings will require planning permission. Where this is the case, most proposals will be considered against Policies CR17 and CR18, where building conversion is proposed. Potential applicants are also referred to Policy SP05 in Chapter 5: Shopping, which deals specifically with diversification proposals that seek to establish a farm shop. Policy SP05 has a different purpose from Policy CR17, as it deals with other issues of a more direct shopping nature. However, these both relate to farm shop proposals.

**CR17** Farm diversification will be permitted where it:

- facilitates economic activity that retains existing or provides additional jobs;
- has no detrimental effect on landscape characteristics, biodiversity or cultural heritage;
- does not involve the loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land unless it can be demonstrated that there is no other site suitable for the particular purpose; and
- has no adverse impact on residential amenity or the highway network.

## Buildings in the Countryside

- 6.62 The Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 1 contained four separate policies about the conversion of under-used buildings in the countryside. The District Council has concluded that those policies were over-complicated and open to misinterpretation, given the linkages between them. This Plan seeks to simplify those policies by making them more flexible and more easily understood.
- 6.63 Many of the traditional farm buildings in the Babergh District make a significant and positive contribution to the character of the landscape and their retention should, therefore, be supported. However, such buildings are often no longer suitable for agricultural use and their future survival is at risk, unless appropriate alternative uses can be found for them.

6.64 The diversification of farm enterprises can provide an important alternative source of income and much needed additional employment opportunities in areas where jobs are scarce. There is an economic argument for retaining and re-using traditional rural buildings. In addition, it can help to protect the landscape quality and character of rural areas by retaining traditional buildings and minimising the need for the new buildings.

**CR18** Proposals for converting barns, or other redundant or under-used buildings in the countryside, to industrial, business, community or recreational uses, will be permitted providing the following criteria are not adversely affected:

- landscape characteristics and biodiversity;
- cultural heritage;
- highway safety;
- residential amenity;
- the location of the building relative to public transport infrastructure, urban centres and whether the use represents sustainable development;
- whether conversion can take place without significant rebuilding;
- whether the building is at risk of flooding;
- the availability of a connection to a suitable drainage system; and
- the presence of protected species, particularly bats or barn owls.

6.65 Depending on the condition or the architectural or historic quality of the building, a full structural survey of the building, or full details of the conversion if the application is submitted in outline form may be required. All proposals relating to the conversion of barns and other redundant or underused buildings in the countryside must be accompanied by the results of a detailed survey of the building(s) to determine whether protected species (particularly bats or barn owls) are present. Precise measures to mitigate the effect of the proposals on any protected species must accompany the development proposals.

- 6.66 To promote sustainable patterns of development, and protect the landscape characteristics and environment of the rural areas, the District Council will continue to regard the conversion of underused buildings in the countryside to residential and tourist/holiday accommodation as the least preferred option. Such residential conversions will only be acceptable if the District Council considers it essential that the building concerned should be retained, because of its intrinsic quality and/or the contribution that it makes to the landscape characteristics of the area; and if it can be effectively demonstrated that the building has no current or future potential for some other, non-residential use. If necessary, Permitted Development Rights will be withdrawn in respect of land in respect of the converted buildings themselves and any land surrounding.
- 6.67 The District Council will require full supporting evidence that the building is not commercially viable for either a business, community or leisure use. This evidence could consist of:
- a comprehensive and sustained marketing campaign (agreed in advance by the District Council) offering the building for either business; community or leisure uses, using an agreed valuation for the premises;
  - the marketing campaign has run for a period of at least 12 months before the planning application has been submitted; and
  - the building has been offered for sale or rent locally in appropriate publications which have been agreed in advance by the District Council.

Where a community use is being marketed, this will require a response from the immediate and surrounding Parish Councils. Where there are found to be shortcomings with the applicant's compliance with the above process, the District Council will request that any of the identified deficiencies with the marketing process be rectified, which could entail undertaking the entire marketing process all over again, to ensure consistency of market information.

**CR19** Proposals for the conversion of barns or other redundant or under-used buildings in the countryside into dwellings or holiday accommodation will only be permitted if:

- it can be demonstrated that the alternative uses for business, community and leisure uses have been thoroughly explored\* and can be discounted;

- the building's location makes it unsuitable for conversion to other uses;
- the building is of architectural or historic merit and is capable of conversion without significant rebuilding or extension;
- the method of conversion retains the character of the building and, in the case of barns, retains the single open volume with minimal change;
- the scheme is acceptable in terms of highway safety;
- the building is not at risk of flooding;
- there is scope for connection to a suitable drainage system; and
- there is no material adverse impact on protected species, particularly bats and barn owls.

\*detailed requirements which may include marketing are set out in paragraph 6.67 above.

6.68 The District Council currently employs an Economic and Community Development Manager and in particular actively promotes available sites and premises, encouraging new businesses to locate in the area.

6.69 The District Council will support proposals to establish low-key employment activities in rural buildings, including farms. It has a scheme to grant aid the conversion and occupation of such premises, to encourage a greater provision of workspace.

6.70 The District Council will also seek to protect employment sites in villages in order to safeguard the economic base of many communities, and has already reserved sites for workshop-scale industries in a number of key villages in the district.

6.71 The District Council works closely with the Suffolk Learning and Skills Council, Business Link, and the local Enterprise Agencies (which the Council also sponsors) and gives free, confidential and professional advice to new and expanding businesses.

6.72 The Settlement Policy (see Chapter 3) allows opportunities for minor new housing growth in settlements, mostly in the form of infilling, but occasionally small groups. Other agencies are active in the provision of housing for local needs and these are generally supported.

6.73 Exceptions to planning policy may be allowed where new dwellings will meet a specified local need.

## Economic Development

## Housing

6.74 By seeking to ensure a variety of house sizes and types, the District Council can try to provide local people with a choice.

6.75 Where resources permit the District Council will consider partnership schemes with the private sector whereby some applicants on the District Council's housing waiting list have the opportunity to purchase the low-cost dwellings which are constructed.

6.76 The District Council will also continue to construct dwellings where finance and land is available. These will generally be to meet the needs of the elderly.

## **Tourism and Leisure**

6.77 The District Council aims to develop the tourist potential of the area in order to help regenerate local economies (see Chapter 8). Tourism can create jobs and can also help preserve redundant buildings.

6.78 The District Council also encourages joint provision and use of facilities for leisure purposes.

6.79 The implementation of enhancement schemes in settlements can also improve the environment aesthetically and promote tourism further.

6.80 Through a number of countryside management initiatives the District Council is providing greater opportunities for access to, and enjoyment of, the countryside.

6.81 The District Council currently participates in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley, and the Greenways countryside management projects. Elsewhere, the District Council also initiates countryside improvements and can give advice and, in some instances, financial help.

## **Protecting Existing Village Facilities**

6.82 The recent steady fall in rural employment opportunities and the increase in car ownership have contributed to the marked decline in local services and facilities in rural communities.

6.83 Each facility lost in a village makes the situation worse, resulting in more people needing to travel further to schools, shops, entertainment etc. The District Council recognises the difficulties and hardship that the loss of a local post office or village store can cause, particularly for the 30% or so of the population who do not own a car, or do not have access to one during the day.

6.84 In response, the District Council has taken a number of steps to help redress the balance and protect local services. These include:

- providing business rate relief to sole shops in villages;

- operating a village shop development scheme, which offers grants to improve shop facilities; and
- providing grant aid to redevelop or improve existing village halls.

The District Council is committed, through the use of its planning powers, to resist the loss of shops and public houses to other uses, unless a compelling case can be clearly demonstrated. Where it lies within its powers, the Council will seek to retain vital village facilities. These may include schools, post offices, public houses and doctors' surgeries together with a broad range of other vital retail, community and recreational uses.

**CR20** Planning permission for a change of use that would result in the loss of a village facility would only be given where it is shown that the facility is no longer needed by the local community, or is no longer commercially viable.

6.85 If applications for a change of use of existing community facilities are received, evidence will be required that:

- a comprehensive and sustained marketing campaign (agreed in advance) offering the facility for sale as a going concern, has been undertaken, using an agreed valuation of the premises;
- the marketing campaign has run for a period of at least 12 months before the planning application is submitted;
- if marketing has been based wholly or partially on an alternative community or employment use, there has been prior discussion on the principle of the proposal; and
- the facility has been offered for sale locally, and in the region, in appropriate publications.

6.86 Supporting evidence will consist of a response from the immediate and surrounding parish and community councils, Suffolk Acre and local residents. Financial viability will need to be of a standard acceptable to the District Council.

6.87 Often the closure of public houses in rural areas generates much local resentment. Public houses perform a useful social role in rural communities, and can also be a source of local employment. Frequently, they occupy historic buildings and make a significant contribution to the character of the locality. Where permission for change of use for a public house is granted, encouragement will be given to the premises remaining in some form of community or employment use.

## New Village Facilities

- 6.88 The quality of life in villages greatly depends on meeting residents' social, cultural and recreational needs. The District Council shares the Government's view stated in PPS7 and in the White Paper Rural England – A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside that village services and facilities perform an important function in rural communities. The District Council will therefore support proposals to improve the quality of life in rural areas, subject to there being no material adverse impact on the environment. These can include new car parks, creating open space, and providing a recycling centre.

**CR21** Proposals to provide new facilities in villages will be supported where they improve the quality of life for the local community and where they do not lead to any material adverse impact on the environment and residential amenity.

## Proposed Local Nature Reserve

- 6.89 In response to the publication of the Babergh Local Plan Alteration No. 2 Issues Report, representations were received about two separate areas of land at Belstead. Taken together, these offer an opportunity to secure landscape, biodiversity and public access benefits in return for two small groups of enabling development. There is an opportunity to secure a large area of land in perpetuity for the local community. The closure of the existing poultry farm on part of the site will enable environmental benefits to be obtained.
- 6.90 The District Council proposes to make the land covered by the following policy a Local Nature Reserve, which will be conveyed to an appropriate organisation (such as the Greenways Countryside Project or RSPB), for appropriate long-term management. Although at one time in arable cultivation the land is a good example of lowland heathland, which is an important habitat and landscape feature. Designation of the land as a Local Nature Reserve will complement the adjoining farmland's entry into an agricultural environment scheme. This farmland, which is owned by Ipswich Borough Council, is managed with wildlife in mind and provides for public access throughout.

**CR22** Approximately 11.2 hectares of land at Mill Farm and Grove Hill, Belstead, are allocated for a Local Nature Reserve. Provision will need to be made for:

- the retention of all perimeter hedgerows and trees;
- encouragement of biodiversity, and in particular, heathland management;

- creating public open space or children's play area;
- safeguarding the existing Public Rights of Way and creating permissive footpaths;
- creating a small car park, for users of the Local Nature Reserve, with access off Grove Hill; and
- managing the Local Nature Reserve by an appropriate organisation, including a programme of work to enhance biodiversity.

A Planning Obligation will be sought to ensure that the above criteria are met and the transfer of the land and commuted sums, if appropriate, are achieved.

- 6.91 It is inevitable that decisions on the viability of village shops will have to be left to the market. People tend to go to larger shops and supermarkets in towns where, overall prices are usually lower and choice is greater. The decline in shopping provision in small communities is, therefore, liable to continue.

## Shops

**CR23** Where there are no detrimental effects on the environment, residential amenity or road safety, proposals for mobile or temporary shopping accommodation will be granted planning permission.

- 6.92 The District Council will also investigate how it can help the small retail outlet particularly where it is the only one in the community.
- 6.93 The District Council would like public services in villages to be maintained at an adequate level.
- 6.94 The District Council will liaise continually with the Education Authority to ensure Education Plans are drawn up in the light of the Local Plan and its objectives. Where village schools have to be closed, the District Council will encourage the use of the building(s) for community purposes where needed.
- 6.95 The Post Office will be encouraged to adopt a sympathetic and flexible attitude in assessing the viability of village post offices.
- 6.96 The District Council will continue to be involved in the decision-making process in relation to the future of schools, bus services, post offices and surgeries. This is particularly important where the interests of sustainable communities are to be protected.

## Public Services

**CR24** Where village schools have to be closed, the use of the building(s) for community purposes in the first instance will be supported.

**CR25** Sites reserved for the purposes of constructing schools and notified as such by the County Council will be protected from other development.

- 6.97 The District Council supports any initiatives aimed at providing alternative transport schemes to supplement conventional services.
- 6.98 The District Council participates in a County-wide concessionary fare scheme for the elderly and disabled.