

26. Countryside Place Strategy

Context

- 26.1. The countryside of Dacorum covers 178 sq kilometres and has a population of just over 13,250 people, occupying about 5,000 homes. The majority (86%) live in villages and hamlets, particularly the selected small villages of Aldbury, Long Marston, Wilstone, Chipperfield, Flamstead, Potten End and Wigginton.
- 26.2. The countryside is valued for its rich historic heritage and attractive landscape. But for a “living countryside” there is also a need to sustain land management and support people living in the villages with an appropriate range of services and access to nearby towns.
- 26.3. Agriculture is the most extensive business in terms of land use, although it has changed significantly in nature over the past 20 years. Most agriculture is arable, with some livestock farming. Whilst commercial farms are getting larger, small-scale ‘hobby farming’ and the demand for horse paddocks and ménages is on the increase, particularly on the urban fringe.

The Vision

Dacorum’s countryside is sustainable, attractive, accessible and valued. The best and most distinctive features have been protected, and visually intrusive areas improved. Woodlands are well managed and provide a source of renewable fuel. The quality and flow of chalk streams has improved. There has been an increase in the numbers of countryside visitors arriving by public transport or bicycle. Changes in agriculture and the rural economy have been supported by appropriate development and sensitive management of the landscape. More food is sourced locally. New housing has helped support the rural workforce and meet local needs.

Local Objectives:

- Provide around 420 new homes between 2006 and 2031.
- Support the rural economy, and particularly farming, local food production and sustainable tourism.
- Conserve and enhance the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Protect and enhance the landscape, habitats and biodiversity, particularly those that are rare or locally distinctive.
- Limit the impact of equine activities on the landscape.
- Protect tranquil parts of the countryside.

Delivering the Vision

- 26.4. Although natural population growth cannot be accommodated due to policy and environmental constraints, around 420 new homes will be provided through small levels of infilling and changes of use, and the identification of rural exception sites.
- 26.5. New housing will be focused on the selected small villages. The precise level of housing development in each village will be based on an assessment of local need, character, size and setting. The qualities of all settlements will be recognised and protected (see Table 11). Conservation Area Statements, the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and associated technical notes and local initiatives such as village design statements, will inform planning decisions.
- 26.6. The retention of village schools, shops, pubs, post offices, churches and meeting places, open space and other basic services and facilities will be supported through local initiatives, the imaginative use of buildings and through mixed use.
- 26.7. The policy of directing main traffic flows to primary routes and away from rural routes will be maintained. Local highway authority initiatives to manage the use of rural lanes and control traffic speeds will be supported. Schemes that promote non-car travel will be encouraged. These include community-based public transport, the creation of improved facilities at Tring station and the enhancement of national and local cycle and footpath networks.
- 26.8. Two locations are identified as Employment Areas in the Green Belt - Bovington Brickworks and Bourne End Mills. Any future development on these sites will need to balance economic considerations with the need to protect of the countryside. Support will be given to appropriate farm diversification schemes. The re-use of farm buildings will however be carefully controlled to ensure that they support the function of the farm unit, that additional traffic can be accommodated on local roads and they do not have a detrimental impact upon countryside character.
- 26.9. To ensure a prosperous countryside, the needs of farmers and others engaged in land management activities will be recognised and supported through planning policies and incentive schemes or grant aid. This aims to restore productive uses of woodland, improve farm economics, develop environmentally sustainable tourism and heritage conservation, and meet the challenges of climate change and rural community development. Initiatives to extend the area of farmland in Environmental Stewardship will be encouraged.
- 26.10. Infrastructure for agriculture and forestry is lacking in the borough and wider county, with livestock markets, abattoirs and grain stores located at substantial distances, adding to transport costs. Initiatives and facilities to support local food production and its sale will be encouraged. Demand for higher standards of animal welfare and food safety and the implications of the resultant development on the countryside will be taken into account in planning decisions.
- 26.11. The potential for 'sustainable tourism' in the Chilterns is recognised and appropriate schemes that support this will be supported. A range of visitor accommodation is already available including hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation. The Grand Union Canal is an important historic, environmental and leisure asset. A number of

boating facilities are available in the area. Additional mooring basins will be directed away from open countryside.

- 26.12. As the urban population grows, pressures on access to the countryside and key attractions such as Ashridge will increase. These 'honeypot' sites will be protected by careful management and alternative attractions promoted.
- 26.13. Productive farmland often comes right up to the settlement boundaries and there are relatively few of the problems usually associated with the urban fringe. There are still pockets of derelict land associated with Bovingdon Airfield, which is within the Green Belt and will in time revert back to their more natural state. This may involve retaining and recycling materials associated with its previous use and improving soil conditions.
- 26.14. The area's key landscape features and habitats, together with the broad approach to their protection and enhancement, are set out in section 16. Grasslands, such as chalk downland and water meadows, need grazing. Woods need to be managed through selective felling and coppicing of their timber. The aim is to secure co-ordinated land management and to support those sensitively engaged in appropriate management.
- 26.15. The countryside has been subject to human activity from prehistory to modern times. There are numerous areas with existing or high potential for heritage assets. Some are of national importance and require particular protection. All heritage assets affected by development should be subject to assessment and appropriate mitigation measures. Some rural practices, such as bio-fuel production and forestry, can damage archaeological features and their impact may therefore merit careful consideration.
- 26.16. Horse riding is a popular activity, and improvements to the bridleway network will be sought. The impact of equine activities on the landscape can be a problem and it will be mitigated in sensitive areas, especially the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Chilterns Conservation Board provides good practice advice.
- 26.17. Problems associated with climate change will be recognised and their impacts mitigated – particularly in terms of nationally important habitats such as the Chiltern beech woods and chalk streams.
- 26.18. Management of the water resource will tackle issues such as low flows and water quality in rivers. Rivers in the borough are currently in moderate condition in terms of their ecological status. The target will be to increase this to 'good' in accordance with the Water Framework Directive.
- 26.19. The tranquillity of the countryside will be recognised and protected. The impact of noise, light and visual intrusion from the main transport routes will be reduced through additional landscaping. Existing light pollution will be managed and not worsened through new development. Proposals to change aircraft routes, resulting in more traffic flying over the Chilterns at lower levels, will be opposed.

Table 11: Characteristics of Small Villages and Hamlets

Landscape Type	Small Village	Hamlet
Chilterns		
Scarpfoot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aldbury 	
Valley Bottom		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nettleden • Rucklers Lane • Piccotts End • Bourne End • Great Gaddesden
Plateau / Ridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potten End • Wigginton • Chipperfield • Flamstead • Little Gaddesden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hudnall • Jockey End • Gaddesden Row • Flaunden • Ringshall
Boarscroft Vale (Beds and Cambridgeshire Claylands)		
Lowland Vale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long Marston • Wilstone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puttenham • Astrope

Notes:

1. The list does not include all villages and hamlets within the borough and is used to show examples of settlements that occur in each landscape type.
2. Landscape type based on categorisation used in the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide (Chilterns Conservation Board, February 2010), with the addition of a 'Lowland Vale' category.
3. The difference between small villages and hamlets relates to the settlements' size and function. For the purposes of Policy CS7, Little Gaddesden is not defined as a small village in the Rural Area.

Countryside Vision Diagram

Figure 28



