

# TOPIC AREA POLICIES



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### 6. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TOPIC AREA

#### NE1 WESTERN WILTSHIRE GREEN BELT

In the Green Belt, outside the village of Box, approval will not be given, for the construction of new buildings, other than:

- i) For agriculture and forestry;
- ii) Essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, for cemeteries and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purpose of including land within that designation;
- iii) The limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings or existing employment buildings.

The re-use of buildings will be approved providing:

- (a) it will not have a materially greater impact than the present use upon the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within that designation;
- (b) strict control is exercised over the extension of re-used buildings, and over any associated uses of land surrounding the building which might conflict with the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within that designation; and
- (c) the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction.

**Approval will not be given for development, which would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt, nor would conflict with the purpose of including land within that designation.**

**6.1** The Western Wiltshire Green Belt was originally approved in 1966 and is part of the larger Green Belt around Bath and Bristol, which was introduced to check the sprawl of development on the edge of the built-up areas and to safeguard the surrounding countryside from development pressures. This policy will have regard to, and be read in the context of, national Planning Policy guidance.

**6.2** The particular objectives of the Western Wiltshire Green Belt, relevant to North Wiltshire, are:

- To maintain the open character of undeveloped land adjacent to Bath, Trowbridge and Bradford on Avon
- To limit the spread of development along the A4 between Batheaston and Corsham

**6.3** Existing Villages in the Green Belt: It is proposed to allow no new building beyond the categories normally appropriate in the Green Belt. This includes the scattered settlements of Ashley, Box Hill, Ditteridge, Kingsdown, and Middlehill. In the case of the village of Box,

infilling only is proposed within the tightly drawn framework boundary as shown on the Proposals Map defining the infill boundary.

## **NE2 THE SWINDON RURAL BUFFER**

**In the Rural Buffers, as defined on the proposals map, new development will be strictly controlled. Approval will not be given for the construction of new buildings which, individually or cumulatively, would lead to the coalescence of settlements. Subject to the proviso, new buildings for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, or other uses appropriate to a rural area will be permitted.**

**6.4** The Wiltshire Structure Plan 2011 introduced a policy (DP13) for a series of Rural Buffers to be maintained to protect the separate identities of towns and villages and prevent their coalescence with Swindon. These settlements included Wootton Bassett, Lydiard Millicent, Purton and Cricklade. It states that Local Plans need to define an area for each settlement that is essential to maintaining its physical separate identity and distinctive character. The extent of the area is limited to only identifying land that is essential to protect the named settlements from the continued growth of Swindon. The policy is intended to protect the buffer from new buildings, to prevent any coalescence from building development pending a decision on the long-term future of the town. The policy is intended not only to prevent coalescence of settlements, but also new building development which might cumulatively lead to such coalescence. Other policies of the Local Plan apply to the Rural Buffer, including policies relating to the conversion of suitable buildings in accordance with the specified criteria. Tree planting and the conservation of the ancient woodlands and unimproved meadows in the area will be encouraged with the help and assistance of the Braydon Forest Countryside Management Project.

**6.5** The general countryside and landscape policies apply to the Rural Buffer. Essential facilities for outdoor sport may include small changing rooms, or unobtrusive spectator accommodation. The extension, alteration, or replacement of dwellings will normally be acceptable in the Rural Buffer, provided proposals do not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Similar considerations would also apply to existing employment buildings.

**6.6** Other Uses Appropriate To A Rural Area: These are uses that comply with the general countryside policies of the Plan and can include outdoor sport, recreation and tourism facilities.

## **NE3 LOCAL RURAL BUFFERS**

**In the Local Rural Buffers, as defined on the proposals map, new development will be strictly controlled. Approval will not be given for the construction of new buildings which, individually or cumulatively, would lead to the coalescence of settlements. Subject to this proviso, new buildings for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, or other uses appropriate to a rural area will be permitted.**

**6.7** The purpose of identifying Local Rural Buffer areas is to prevent coalescence between settlements, cumulative or otherwise, and protect settlements' separate identity and distinctive character. This is the same criteria as for the Rural Buffer but applied to main settlements other than those adjacent to Swindon. The Local Rural Buffers have been defined to protect areas of land considered as particularly at risk and in danger of development where this is undesirable.

**6.8** Within such sensitive gaps between settlements, it will be important to restrict the erection of certain buildings that may generally be appropriate in the countryside, but which could lead to the visual coalescence of these settlements. The land can continue to be used for open uses, such as agriculture, woodland, and public and private open space. Buildings will be limited to those essential for the needs of agriculture or forestry, or justified in association with existing or open uses. Such buildings should generally be ancillary to or directly associated with the open use of the land, should be carefully sited, and should be of a scale and design to harmonise with the character and appearance of the area. Development will also be subject to the other policies of the Local Plan as appropriate.

#### **NE4 AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

**In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape. The environmental effects of all development will be a major consideration. Development will be restricted to:**

- i) The change of use of existing buildings; and/or**
- ii) That which is appropriate to the economic and social well-being of the area;**
- iii) That which is desirable for the understanding and enjoyment of its amenities;**

**And provided the proposal:**

- a) Conserves or enhances, the natural beauty of the landscape, including its open rural character, and any riverside or water features, wildlife sites, trees or woodland;**
- b) Is sited and designed so as to minimise its impact on the natural beauty of the area and, where possible, is located close to and in association with existing buildings; and**
- c) Uses appropriate building materials and landscaping.**

**Other proposals and major developments including of an industrial or commercial nature will not be permitted except in exceptional circumstances. These proposals shall be subject to the most rigorous examination and will be demonstrated to be in the public interest. Consideration of such applications will include an assessment of:**

- i) the need for the development, in terms of national considerations, and the impact of permitting it or refusing it upon the local economy;**
- ii) the cost of and scope for developing elsewhere outside the area or meeting the need for it in some other way;**
- iii) any detrimental effect on the environment and the landscape, and the extent to which that should be moderated.**

**Major developments that are permitted will be carried out to high environmental standards through the application of appropriate conditions.**

**6.9** The two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the District are the North Wessex Downs and the Cotswolds. The policy has regard to current national Planning Policy Guidance. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and additional legal powers are contained in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

**6.10** The purpose of designation is as follows:

- (a) The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- (b) In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development which in themselves, conserve and enhance the environment.
- (c) Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

**6.11** The Cotswold AONB has a Conservation Board and the North Wessex Downs AONB has a Council of Partners. Both have Landscape Character Assessments and Management Plans which should be taken fully into consideration in addition to the landscape assessment for the district.

**NE5 NATURE CONSERVATION SITES OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE**

**Development which may affect a European Site or a proposed European Site will be subject to the most rigorous examination. Development that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation, which is likely to have significant effects on the site (either individually or in combination with other plans and projects) where it cannot be ascertained that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the site, will not be permitted unless:**

- i) there is no alternative solution,**
- ii) there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the development, and**
- iii) in exceptional cases compensation measures are available to protect the overall coherence of the network of European sites.**

**Appropriate conditions or planning obligations may be used where mitigation measures will successfully avoid adverse impacts to the integrity of the site.**

**6.12** European sites comprise Special Areas of Conservation designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). In England, these European sites received stringent statutory protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations (1994).

**6.13** Within North Wiltshire there are two areas of international nature conservation importance, these are:

1. Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation), comprising the Box Mine SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). European interest in the site, including the underground mine workings, is due to the presence of the Greater Horseshoe Bat, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat and Bechstein's Bat. These bats are dependent on caves, mines and other cavelike places for undisturbed hibernation over the winter, as well as old mature forests, rough pasture, or linking hedgerows and large old buildings for feeding and roosting in summer.
2. North Meadow and Clattinger Farm cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation), comprising North Meadow, Cricklade SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and Clattinger Farm SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). European interest in the site is focused on the lowland hay meadows rich in herbs and grasses, of which these are two of the best examples in the UK.

**6.14** For all proposed developments in the vicinity of, or in a site of international nature conservation importance, the local authority will consider the impact of the development to the sites and whether the development alone or in combination with other plans or projects will result in a 'likely' significant effect. The authority will require the developer to provide such information as may be reasonably required for the purposes of an assessment. English Nature will be consulted on appropriate assessments. If permission is granted, appropriate conditions or planning obligations will be used to mitigate the adverse effects on the site. English Nature's Habitats Regulations Guidance Notes will be used for reference.

## **NE6 NATURE CONSERVATION SITES OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE**

**Development in or likely to affect Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) will be subject to special scrutiny. Where such development may have an adverse effect directly or indirectly on the special interest of the site, it will not be permitted unless the reasons for the development clearly outweigh the nature conservation and/or geological value of the site itself and the national policy to safeguard such sites.**

**Where development is permitted the authority will impose conditions or seek to negotiate planning obligations to ensure the protection and enhancement of the site's nature conservation and/or geological interest.**

**6.15** These SSSI's are part of a network of sites which represent the country's very best wildlife and geology, often standing out as the last remaining areas of natural habitat in our modern countryside. SSSIs are designated for their special nature conservation interest by the Nature Conservancy Council for England (known as English Nature), which serves to protect the interest of the site. SSSIs may include rare plants, animals, geology or landforms of special interest. There are a total of 31 SSSIs, covering about 705 hectares in North Wiltshire.

**6.16** The essential characteristic of National Nature Reserves is that they are primarily used for nature conservation. Set up under the provisions of the National Parks and

Access to the Countryside Act 1949, to protect important national sites, the sites are owned or leased by English Nature, or bodies approved by them, or are managed in accordance with Nature Reserve Agreements with landowners and occupiers. North Wiltshire has one National Nature Reserve at North Meadow, near Cricklade, which is also a SSSI. Development that involves any potentially damaging works in these areas will only be granted under exceptional circumstances, as determined by statutory bodies such as English Nature.

**6.17** A full list of SSSI's in the District can be found in Appendix 1.

**6.18** Environmental Impact assessments will be required to be submitted with planning applications for developments that may adversely affect SSSIs.

### **NE7 NATURE CONSERVATION SITES OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE**

**Development likely to have an adverse effect on a Wildlife Site (including Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites) or a Local Nature Reserve will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there are reasons for the proposal which outweigh the need to safeguard the substantive nature conservation and/or geological value of the site.**

**Where development is permitted, the authority will impose conditions and/or seek to negotiate planning obligations to provide appropriate mitigation and compensatory measures.**

**6.19** Wildlife Sites have been identified by the Wildlife Sites Project Steering Group. As they are not statutory designations, the location, extent and number of sites are likely to change over time. Up to date information should be sought from the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre.

### **NE8 NATURE CONSERVATION AREAS IN THE COTSWOLD WATER PARK**

**Development on and around those lakes identified on the proposals map as being of international or national importance for nature conservation in the Cotswolds Water Park will be subject to policies NE5 and NE6.**

**Development on other areas within the Water Park will only be permitted where:**

- i) The value of the site for nature conservation, and its local contribution to biodiversity, would not be seriously harmed, or could be mitigated by planning conditions, obligations or the creation of new, equivalent wildlife features; or where**
- ii) Other material planning considerations are sufficient to override the importance of protecting the local nature conservation value of the site.**

**6.20** The Cotswold Water Park forms the largest concentration of man-made lakes in Britain and has been created through mineral workings. It forms the most extensive marl lake system in the Country. All the lakes of the Water Park within North Wiltshire are Wildlife sites. Lake 52 is part of the Cotswold Park SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and the area contains several other grassland SSSIs and one cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation). Lake 40 has a very important reedbed habitat.



**6.21** The Cotswold Water Park Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) sets out the nature conservation framework for the area and relevant targets which should be taken into consideration in any proposed development. The aim of the policy is to maintain the overall scale and importance of the area of the Water Park as a nationally and regionally important nature conservation area.

**6.22** Development will normally only be permitted where it is compatible with sustaining the biodiversity resource of the site in particular, and the area in general, and where the proposed development is able to demonstrate that it can avoid irreversible change or damage to important nature conservation sites. The policy should be taken in the context of the Cotswold Water Park Strategy so that a balanced approach is taken between mineral working, recreation/tourism, development and nature conservation.

**6.23** The Cotswold Water Park supports a substantial interest including nationally significant numbers of wintering birds and regionally significant numbers of breeding birds. An opportunity exists for permitting appropriate development and land uses in and around the lakes of the Water Park, where such development is able to either:

- (a) Demonstrate that the proposal will not reduce the wintering and breeding bird numbers, or adversely affect any other important wildlife or natural feature; or
- (b) Compensate for any potential reduction in the number of important wintering or breeding birds, or other adverse affects on any important wildlife or natural feature, by ensuring that adequate and suitable new or enhanced areas of replacement habitat are provided on a permanent or long-term basis as part of the proposals, such that the applicant can demonstrate that the nature conservation value of the area as a whole will not be diminished by the proposed development.

**6.24** This policy should be considered in association with the Wiltshire and Swindon Minerals Local Plan strategy for mineral working, restoration and after use for the area. The Airfield Safeguarding Areas around RAF Fairford and South Cerney and RAF Lyneham shall also be taken into consideration in terms of the potential encroachment of birds which could interfere with air traffic.

## **NE9 PROTECTION OF SPECIES**

**Planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on badgers or species protected by Schedules 1,5 or 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 or Schedule 2 of The Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations (1994) and Protection of Badgers Act 2000.**

**Exceptionally, where the reasons for development clearly outweigh the nature conservation value of the species, national policy, and there are no suitable alternatives, the planning authority will impose conditions on the planning permission or enter into planning obligations to:**

- i) facilitate the survival of the individual members of the species,**
- ii) reduce disturbance to a minimum, and**
- iii) provide adequate alternative habitats to ensure the population is maintained at favourable conservation status within its natural range.**

**6.25** The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a local planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat. If the proposals are likely to have an effect on protected species or protected species habitat, protected species surveys must be undertaken and contact made with the other relevant bodies such as English Nature prior to the determination of the application. Detailed and adequate mitigation proposals must be submitted with the planning application where impacts on protected species are predicted.

**6.26** European protected species under Annex IV to the European Union Habitats Directive receive extra protection under the Habitat Regulations (1994). English Nature should be referred to for further information. The local Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) will also give information on species likely to be found in the area such as water voles.

## **NE10 MANAGING NATURE CONSERVATION FEATURES**

**Development which may adversely affect, directly or indirectly, landscape features which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora will only be permitted if it can be shown that the reasons for the development outweigh the need to retain the features and that mitigating measures can be provided for, which would reinstate the nature conservation value of the features.**

**Appropriate management of these features will be encouraged through the use of conditions or planning obligations and by entering into management agreements with landowners and developers where appropriate.**

**6.27** There is a legal requirement through Article 10 of the EC Habitats Directive, as transposed into Regulation 37 of the Habitats Regulations 1994, to encourage the management of features which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora.

**6.28** This applies to designated and undesignated areas. Features of major importance are listed in supporting text for Policy NE11 Conserving Biodiversity. However this policy applies to any feature used as a wildlife corridor or as a refuge for wild species as they move through the landscape.

## **NE11 CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY**

**Development proposals should ensure that species and habitats set out in the UK and local biodiversity action plans will be protected, and where possible, enhanced to help deliver BAP targets.**

**Development which would adversely affect, directly or indirectly, the biodiversity of the district will only be permitted when mitigating measures can be provided to retain and reinstate the level of biodiversity value. In order to achieve this, conditions and/or planning obligations will be used.**

**Appropriate management will also be encouraged through use of conditions, planning obligations and/or by entering into management agreements with landowners and developers, where appropriate.**

**6.29** The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) (2002) was produced by the Wiltshire BAP Forum. It identifies key habitats which should be taken into consideration in any development. Briefly these include:

1. Deciduous Woodland such as at Bowood and Braydon Forest.
2. Wood/pasture and parkland features in some areas including Bowood.
3. Grassland habitats such as the seasonally inundated neutral grasslands/hay meadows at North Meadow Cricklade, the calcareous limestone grassland of the Cotswold and the Chalk downland of the North Wessex Downs.
4. Old hedgerows which form valuable reservoirs and corridors for wildlife.
5. Key wetland habitats including river systems, canals, and the extensive standing water of the Cotswold Water Park.
6. The Box Mine which accommodates rare bats and is a cSAC.
7. Arable land which supports species such as brown hare and stone curlew and is important for rare arable weeds.

The value of urban areas for wildlife should also be taken into consideration.

**6.30** The UK BAP priority habitats that are found in North Wiltshire include:

1. Ancient and/or species rich hedgerows
2. Caves and natural rock exposures
3. Cereal field margins
4. Eutrophic standing waters
5. Lowland calcareous grassland
6. Lowland meadows
7. Lowland wood-pasture and parkland
8. Reedbeds
9. Wet woodland

**6.31** Developers will be expected to submit an assessment of the ecological effects of their development proposal. If required, there should be a programme of avoidance, mitigation and management, that results in at least no net loss for biodiversity and a net gain where possible. Developers should seek opportunities for biodiversity gain; for example by the provision of land for creation of suitable habitats such as wetlands.

## **NE12 WOODLAND**

**The creation, conservation, enhancement and positive management of woodlands across the district will be supported. In particular, areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland should be protected. The retention of the visual amenity and nature conservation value will be sought in particular at the following:**

- i) **Bird's Marsh Wood, Chippenham**
- ii) **Vincient's Wood, Chippenham**
- iii) **Pockeredge Drive Wood, Corsham**
- iv) **Woodland within Braydon Forest.**

**6.32** Woodlands are a very important element within the landscape of the district. They enhance urban areas and edges and the wider countryside. They have landscape, visual and nature conservation value, are often historic features and can be used for recreation. Ancient and semi-natural woodlands are particularly important and are protected. Circular 9/95 (General Development Order Consolidation) should be referred to in this regard. The multi-purpose use of forestry and woodland is supported and should be carried out in accordance with the English Forestry Strategy and UK Forestry Standard.

**6.33** Bird's Marsh Wood, Vincient's Wood and Pockeredge Drive Wood have been specifically identified in the Local Plan in view of their importance to the landscape setting of their respective towns, where they are not covered by other landscape designations. Bird's Marsh Wood is a large wood of approximately 24 hectares, which is valuable for its flora and its refuge for wildlife.

Vincient's Wood, under the control of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, forms a significant landscape feature, the protection of which is further needed due to its being surrounded by housing and the Western Bypass.

The woodland at Pockeredge Drive forms part of a wider wooded landscape in the historic Box Tunnel Valley area.

Braydon Forest is a larger area covering a number of SSSI's. The Braydon Forest Project is run by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust with the aim of conserving and enhancing the distinctive landscape of the old Braydon Forest comprising pasture and coppice woodland.

### **NE13 THE GREAT WESTERN COMMUNITY FOREST**

**Development shall only be permitted where it does not prejudice the implementation of the Great Western Community Forest Plan.**

**6.34** The Great Western Community Forest is one of twelve forests for the community in the UK. Its aim is to develop a multi-purpose forest around Swindon, creating a high quality environment for everybody. The Forest covers a large area of the North East of the District. Development proposals should accord with the aims and objectives of the Great Western Community Forest contained in the "Great Western Community Forest Plan 1994". This is a non-statutory document with proposals extending over a period of 30 years.

**6.35** The Forest Plan does not necessarily preclude appropriate development that would be acceptable in terms of other policies but matters that should be taken into account include:

1. The improvement of the landscape.
2. Increasing opportunities for access, recreation and cultural events.
3. Protecting areas of conservation and landscape value.
4. Creating new opportunities for conservation.
5. Creating new opportunities for environmental education.
6. Establishing supplies of local timber.
7. Improving the environment of housing and commerce.

8. Encouraging community involvement in the creation and management of the Forest.
9. Protecting and enhancing strategic green corridors that are identified in the Forest Plan and which provide a range of integrated functions and activities.

#### **NE14 TREES, SITE FEATURES AND THE CONTROL OF NEW DEVELOPMENT**

**Permission will not be granted for proposals that would result, or be likely to result, in the loss of trees, hedges, lakes/ponds or other important landscape or ecological features that could be successfully and appropriately incorporated into the design of a development.**

**Planning conditions will be imposed and Tree Preservation Orders made, for safeguarding single and small groups of trees in the interests of public amenity.**

**6.36** It is the duty of the local planning authority to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees. The latter should be substantially native tree species of local provenance.

**6.37** It will be expected that assessments to determine the nature conservation and landscape value features both within and adjacent to sites will be undertaken. Details of any assessment should be submitted with a planning application.

**6.38** For example, a tree survey should be carried out of the site and directly adjacent land by a competent expert to establish the quality and condition of trees potentially affected by development as appropriate.

**6.39** Development shall be designed to ensure the longevity of retained vegetation and features through appropriate management and mitigation measures. British Standard 5837: 1991 - Guide for Trees in Relation to Construction, offers relevant guidance for trees.

#### **NE15 THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE**

**The landscape of North Wiltshire and its locally distinctive characteristics shall be conserved and enhanced, development will be permitted if it does not adversely affect the character of an area and features that contribute to local distinctiveness.**

**Development shall take into account:**

- i) **The setting of, and relationship between, settlement and buildings and the landscape.**
- ii) **The pattern of woodland, trees, field boundaries, other vegetation and features.**
- iii) **The special qualities of watercourses and waterbodies and their surroundings such as river valleys.**

**iv) The topography of the area avoiding sensitive skylines, hills and not detracting from important views.**

**The best and most versatile agricultural land shall be protected from non-agricultural development.**

**6.40** The landscape shall be safeguarded for its own sake and in order to protect its intrinsic character and beauty. The authority shall find ways of enriching the quality of the whole countryside while accommodating appropriate development.

**6.41** A landscape character assessment has been prepared for the district which defines 17 character areas. Each area is described in terms of its character, key characteristics, management guidelines and actions, and landscape sensitivity. It is intended that the assessment will become a supplementary planning document and development shall take it into account. The built up areas of Chippenham, Calne, Corsham, Wootton Bassett, Cricklade and Malmesbury have not been described in detail as they are not in open countryside.

**6.41a** Some sensitive landscapes close to and within settlements, such as river valleys and corridors, are included in Conservation Areas. These are covered in Policy HE1 Development in Conservation Areas.

**6.42** Building in the open countryside, away from existing settlements or from areas allocated for development, shall be strictly controlled. All development in rural areas shall contribute to sustainability, be well designed, in keeping and in scale with its location, and sensitive to the area's landscape character and local distinctiveness. In particular, isolated new houses in the countryside require special justification.

**6.42a** The best and most versatile agricultural land is defined as Grades 1, 2 and 3a in the Agricultural Land Classification. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) shall be used in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations.

## **NE16 RENEWABLE ENERGY**

**Renewable energy projects will be permitted provided that such development would not:**

- i) cause harm to a designated historic area or natural landscape;**
- ii) conflict with the need to have special justification for development in the Green Belt.**

**6.43** Renewable energy sources can contribute to the provision of diverse, secure and sustainable energy supplies and a reduction in the emission of pollutants. The Government is committed to providing targets for a proportion of UK's electricity demand being met from renewable energy sources.

**6.44** The Strategic Framework for the Development of Renewable Energy in the South West has set a renewable electricity generation target of 11% to 15% by 2010. Achieving this target is expected to bring wide-ranging economic, social and environmental benefits to the South West Region.

**6.45** Examples of renewable energy installations that can be considered in North Wiltshire include wind turbines, solar energy technologies, waste to energy, combined heat and power and biomass. Small battery charging turbines, appropriately located, are to be welcomed. It is recognised that this is not a definitive list and will change according to technological progress.

**6.46** Proposals within the designated Rural Buffer, Local Rural Buffers, Conservation Areas, in (or affecting the setting of) Listed Buildings and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be especially scrutinised to ensure that they will not conflict with the purpose of those designations.

**6.47** Only in very special circumstances will renewable energy installations be appropriate in the Green Belt. In considering whether such circumstances exist, the local planning authority will need to be satisfied that the wider environmental benefits of renewable energy production cannot be achieved by equivalent development opportunities available elsewhere within the District.

#### **NE17 CONTAMINATED LAND**

**Development will only be permitted on land that is known or is suspected to be contaminated where there is a reasonable prospect of remediation. The Council will require planning applications on such land to be accompanied by a thorough survey showing the type and extent of contamination on and beneath the site.**

**On contaminated sites capable of remediation, development will only be allowed to proceed subject to the implementation of appropriate measures to remedy the contamination and/or where the land is made suitable for the proposed end use.**

**6.48** A key aim of the North Wiltshire Local Plan is to reuse developed land. Much of this land will have been used for industrial purposes and therefore liable to contamination. Future land uses must not be put at risk from pollution.

**6.49** A full assessment of potential hazards and the measures necessary to counter these will be required before applications are determined. The responsibility for providing information on whether land is contaminated rests with the developer. Developers should liaise with the Environment Agency to establish the need for studies to be undertaken into potential effects on water resources.

#### **NE18 NOISE AND POLLUTION**

**Development will only be permitted where it would not generate, or itself be subject to, harm upon public health or cause pollution to the environment by the emission of excessive noise, light intrusion, smoke, fumes, other forms of air pollution, heat, radiation, effluent or vibration.**

**6.50** The control of pollution is governed by the Environmental Protection Act (1990) and related legislation. Planning, however, has a role to play in separating potentially polluting land uses. New development should be designed to ensure that it does not cause environmental pollution, which then has to be controlled by other agencies. Appropriate mitigation measures will be expected to be incorporated into development proposals with a potential to pollute. Where measures cannot be achieved planning permission will be refused.

**6.51** To minimise the air pollution from roads and buildings, development proposals will be expected to incorporate suitable landscaping to help remove air borne pollutants and particulates.

**6.52** Lighting should be as energy efficient as possible or run off renewable energy and minimise upward light pollution.

**6.53** Particular attention should be paid to those sites that are to include hazardous substances or be sited near to establishments where hazardous substances are used or stored. In such cases, early consultation with the Health and Safety Executive is recommended.

## **NE19 MINISTRY OF DEFENCE LAND**

**Development on Ministry of Defence land for military purposes and ancillary operational development will be permitted provided that it does not cause demonstrable harm to the character of the countryside by reason of scale, siting, or design.**

**6.54** Proposals should be in accord with and will be assessed against the other policies contained within this plan. However, where there are national security interests that cannot be accommodated within those policies digression from those policies may be appropriate. Planning applications will be expected to take note of the other policies and give a reasoned justification for any digression. It is recognised that in circumstances of an urgent nature and of national importance that development can be permitted by the Secretary of State, without consideration by North Wiltshire District Council. Such is the nature and extent of the Ministry of Defence's landholding; in North Wiltshire scope may exist to enable new military development to be accommodated within existing sites, without further serious detriment to the character and appearance of the countryside in general. Proposals should aim to improve the appearance of sites, including appropriate landscaping.

## **NE20 RE-USE OF MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

**The redevelopment, conversion and/or change of use of existing or former ministry of defence establishments to business, industrial or storage use (B1, B2 and B8), hotel (C1), non-residential institution (D1), or assembly and leisure uses (D2) will be permitted, where:**

- i) The proposal will result in the removal of unsightly or inappropriate buildings or bring other environmental benefits;**
- ii) The proposal is of a form, bulk and general design in keeping with the local area;**
- iii) Redevelopment will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the existing building(s) are not suitable for re-use or conversion and the redevelopment does not exceed the general footprint of the existing building(s).**

**Proposals for the development of open areas will not be permitted.**



**6.55** The Local Planning Authority will expect the developer to demonstrate the unsuitability of the existing buildings for conversion or re-use in their planning applications. Given the nature and location of MOD sites in North Wiltshire, proposals for the development of open areas will not be permitted, as these sites constitute substantial land holdings in severely unsustainable locations.

## **NE21 DEVELOPMENT IN FLOOD RISK AREAS**

**Development in areas of flood risk will be expected to be in accordance with a sequential approach whereby sites are developed in order of risk, with a preference for the development of sites with no flood risk. Developers will need to demonstrate that for developments proposed in higher risk flood areas that there are no other appropriate sites available in lower risk areas. Development in flood risk areas must provide at least the minimum standard of flood defences that can be maintained for the lifetime of the development and must not:**

- i) Impede flood flows, or**
- ii) Increase flood risk elsewhere, or**
- iii) Result in a net loss of floodplain storage.**

**Where development proposals are on previously developed sites at risk from flooding, there should be a preference for areas already defended to the minimum standard.**

**6.56** The definition of areas at 'high risk' of flooding are detailed within Planning Policy Guidance note 25 – Development and flood risk (PPG25). When the annual probability of flooding, with defences where they exist, is 1.0% (1 in a 100 years flood) or greater, then the area would be classed as 'high risk'. A sequential approach is to be taken for the location of new development, with applications in higher risk areas demonstrating that there are no reasonable options available in lower-risk sites. In areas liable to flood a flood risk assessment should be undertaken to ascertain which category the site is in. The assessment should be in accordance to the approach detailed in PPG25, which also details the type of development that would be acceptable in the various flood risk category areas.

**6.57** This policy accords with the Local Plan strategy to direct new residential development to the District's urban areas. High risk flood areas should only be redeveloped where there are no other suitable lower-risk sites available. Developers will also need to demonstrate if the site does not have existing defences, that there are no other suitable sites that already have defences in place.

**6.58** New development should not put other areas at risk of flooding, thus the flood storage capacity must be protected to retain the watercourses' capacity to discharge and/or store flood flows without causing or making existing flooding problems worse. In exceptional circumstances, where development is permitted on undeveloped land in an area liable to flood, the developer will be required to submit details demonstrating that the scheme is designed to cope with the risk of flooding and includes effective measures to protect the land on a long term basis. The Environment Agency has made detailed floodplain maps available on its website ([www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)).

## **NE22 SURFACE WATER RUN OFF**

**New development should not increase run-off from the undeveloped situation and for redevelopment reduce run-off. Development should not deplete or pollute ground water flows or result in discharges of pollutants into water courses. Proposals will be required to demonstrate Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) principles. Proposals within water source protection zones will not be permitted unless measures are included to maintain the quality and quantity of groundwater.**

**6.59** All development, especially where hard surfaces are created, will have an impact upon the water environment. Traditionally, piped water systems were used to dispose of water run off, but this method has the potential to increase the risk of flooding and local pollution incidents. PPG25 (Planning Policy Guidance note 25 – Development and flood risk) states that sustainable drainage systems can play an important role in reducing this risk. The Council will actively encourage the use of sustainable drainage systems in development proposals. There are a number of principles that these systems follow:

- Control water discharge as soon as possible after precipitation;
- Slowing down the speed of discharge off-site;
- Dealing with runoff close to where the rain falls;
- Managing potential pollution at its source now and in the future; and
- Protecting water resources from point pollution (such as accidental spills) and diffuse sources.

## **NE23 WATER COURSES**

**Development adjacent to any watercourse will only be permitted where retention of a natural corridor is provided to cater for channel maintenance, enhancement and environmental interests.**

**6.60** The policy applies to all water courses, from main rivers to small streams and canals, and relates to the channel of water and its banks. Water courses should be preserved wherever possible in their existing and natural state, including their flow characteristics. The culverting of watercourses should be avoided wherever possible and, if required for example in connection with road access, should be kept to the minimum that is necessary. The opportunity for enhancement should be taken in and adjacent to new development.

**6.61** Bank protection works can be particularly unsightly and damaging in appearance and other ways. Where such works are necessary to protect property or rights of way, care needs to be taken to ensure that the design and its use of materials do not unduly harm the amenities or appearance of the area.