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## **SECTION 6 - AGRICULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

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### ***INTRODUCTION***

- 6.1 Agriculture is the largest land use activity in the District and plays an important role in the local economy. The landscape in the District has gained its present appearance largely as a result of the methods and systems of agriculture practised over many years.
- 6.2 Agricultural land is graded according to the physical and chemical properties of the soil, which largely dictate the nature and form of agricultural activity possible in any area.
- 6.3 Much of the land in East Northamptonshire is Grade 3 (moderate to good quality). There is, however, a smaller area of Grade 2 (good quality). Farming is mixed, although the cultivation of crops is the dominant activity.

### ***STRUCTURE PLAN POLICIES***

- 6.4 The Northamptonshire County Structure Plan establishes the basis for guiding and controlling all development. Any development proposed, on or adjacent to agricultural land, will have to pay full regard to the requirements of agriculture and the need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from development which is irreversible.
- 6.5 In addition, strategic policies have been approved to govern proposals for stables, riding schools, horticultural establishments, intensive livestock units and the use of redundant buildings in the countryside.

### ***RECENT TRENDS***

- 6.6 In recent years the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community (EC) has resulted in the over production of a whole range of agricultural products. This has led to the adoption of policies to "set aside" or take land out of production, in an attempt to reduce surpluses.
- 6.7 There has been a continual decline in agricultural employment over many years. For a long time this stemmed from the industry becoming increasingly capital, rather than labour intensive. In recent years, the decline in the profitability of the industry has led to farm amalgamations and the shedding of labour, in order to further reduce costs and overheads.

### ***ISSUES***

- 6.8 The substantial surplus of the main agricultural products in the EC, is bringing about the need to seek diversification of rural economies.
- 6.9 Current advice from the Government is that when considering planning applications involving the loss of agricultural land, the need to encourage economic development must be balanced against the need to ensure environmental protection, as well as restricting the loss of agricultural land of the best quality.
- 6.10 There is value in maintaining the countryside for its own sake, regardless of whether it is also a productive resource. What this means, is protecting the countryside for its landscape, nature conservation, historical and recreational value rather than just for agricultural production.
- 6.11 Although employment in the agricultural industry has fallen and is unlikely to generate any major employment expansion in the foreseeable future, a prosperous farming industry will help associated industries to flourish and will assist in conserving and improving the landscape.

- 6.12 The changing fortunes of the agricultural industry have implications for the nature, type and location of buildings which house stock, crops and machinery. The increasingly mechanised, industrialised and diversified nature of the industry, leads to pressures for development required by agriculturally related uses. Agricultural engineers, hauliers, food processing and packing industries all make locational demands. It is rare that such uses need to be located in the open countryside and they may be better suited to industrial and commercial sites in market towns.
- 6.13 As public tastes change and agricultural production methods are questioned, the way animals are reared and crops are grown, may also change. The use of intensive methods of animal husbandry and scientific methods of cultivation using herbicides, pesticides and artificial fertilisers are all now being re-examined. It is felt by many people and organisations, that the impact of these activities upon the environment is likely to be unacceptable in the long term.
- 6.14 The return to more traditional ways in how crops and animals are reared, will require different types of buildings and structures. These will have an impact upon the open countryside and landscape and may be unacceptable in certain areas.

### ***POLICY OBJECTIVES***

- 6.15 The agriculture policy objectives of this Plan are to:-
- (i) prevent the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land;
  - (ii) control the siting and design of agricultural buildings;
  - (iii) control the conversion and re-use of redundant agricultural buildings;
  - (iv) control the development of agriculturally related enterprises in the countryside; and
  - (v) stipulate the circumstances in which agricultural and replacement dwellings will be permitted.

### ***AGRICULTURE POLICIES AND PROPOSALS***

#### ***Agricultural Land***

##### **POLICY AG1**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT NORMALLY BE GRANTED FOR PROPOSALS INVOLVING THE USE OF THE BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (GRADES 1, 2 AND 3A), UNLESS THERE IS NO OTHER SITE SUITABLE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT INTENDED**

- 6.16 Agricultural land is a finite resource which cannot be replaced once lost to most forms of development. The best and most versatile land should not be lost to development, except where no alternative sites exist.
- 6.17 In attempting to minimise the loss of land of high quality the District Council will take into account the requirements of the agricultural industry, the need to conserve and protect the environment and to direct development to derelict, vacant or under-used land, whenever possible. Other considerations will be the nature of the intended activity and its compatibility with the rural area, the amount of land intended to be lost to agricultural production and the possible disruption to farm units.

#### ***Agricultural Buildings***

##### **POLICY AG2**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE ERECTION, EXTENSION OR ALTERATIONS OF BUILDINGS FOR THE PURPOSES OF AGRICULTURE, PROVIDED THAT THE PROPOSAL IS CONSIDERED TO BE SATISFACTORY IN TERMS OF DESIGN, MATERIALS, LANDSCAPING, IMPACT UPON THE SURROUNDING AREA, METHOD OF HANDLING EFFLUENTS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

- 6.18 Agricultural buildings including storage operations and agricultural equipment maintenance, which require planning permission tend to be either large, adjacent to roads and dwellings, of some considerable height or a combination of these factors. The District Council will wish to ensure that the buildings blend into the local surroundings and are acceptable in appearance when viewed from a distance. They should be constructed of sympathetic materials in subdued colours.

### **POLICY AG3**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR NEW INTENSIVE LIVESTOCK UNITS WITHIN THE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA. ALTERATIONS, ADAPTATIONS AND EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING INTENSIVE LIVESTOCK UNITS WITHIN THE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:-**

- (I) THERE IS NO ADVERSE IMPACT UPON THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA;**
- (II) THERE IS NO LOSS OF AMENITY TO ADJOINING LAND USERS;**
- (III) PROVISION IS MADE FOR THE SATISFACTORY STORAGE, TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL, OF EFFLUENTS WHICH ARE GENERATED BY THE DEVELOPMENT; AND**
- (IV) ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE IS OR CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE TO SERVE THE DEVELOPMENT**

- 6.19 Structures and equipment for effluent storage may be required in order to avoid pollution. For example the Welfare of Pigs Regulations 1991 prohibited the installation of stall and tether systems from 1 October 1991 and ban the use of these systems altogether from 1 January 1999. Farmers using these close confinement systems are likely to need to double the space allocation for sows and provide extra storage space for bedding straw and solid manure. The District Council will therefore adopt a positive approach when determining planning applications for building developments which are designed, or are necessary, to ensure compliance with new environmental, hygiene and welfare legislation. Structures associated with proposals of this nature, however, may have an adverse effect upon the environment. Therefore every aspect associated with such schemes needs to be considered carefully, so as to minimise their impact.

### *The Re-use and Adaptation of Buildings in the Countryside*

#### **POLICY AG4**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE ADAPTATION OR RE-USE OF BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, PROVIDED THAT THE FORM, BULK AND GENERAL DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED SCHEME IS IN KEEPING WITH THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA, AND THE RE-USE IS FOR EMPLOYMENT, LEISURE OR TOURISM, OR RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION FOR AGRICULTURE OR FORESTRY WORKERS. IN ADDITION:-**

- (I) EXTENSIVE ALTERATION, RE-BUILDING, LARGE SCALE EXTENSIONS AND THOSE NOT IN KEEPING WITH THE EXISTING BUILDING WILL NOT BE PERMITTED;**
- (II) STRUCTURAL SURVEYS WILL BE REQUIRED FOR PROPOSALS RELATING TO BUILDINGS WHICH ARE UNOCCUPIED AND SHOW EVIDENCE OF SOME DERELICTION;**
- (III) CONDITIONS WILL BE IMPOSED WITHDRAWING PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS TO PREVENT FUTURE EXTENSIONS, WHERE THESE WOULD RESULT IN AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA;**
- (IV) PROPOSALS WHICH WOULD RESULT IN AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE AMENITIES OF SURROUNDING LAND USERS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED;**

**(V) DETAILED DRAWINGS WILL BE REQUIRED, INDICATING THE LAYOUT, DESIGN AND EXTERNAL APPEARANCE OF THE BUILDING AFTER CONVERSION, THE MATERIALS TO BE USED, THE MEANS OF ACCESS AND LANDSCAPING PROPOSALS; AND**

**(VI) THE LOCAL HIGHWAY NETWORK MUST BE CAPABLE OF SATISFACTORILY ACCOMMODATING THE TRAFFIC GENERATED BY THE DEVELOPMENT**

- 6.20 The re-use of sound buildings, which make a positive contribution to the countryside of the District, is supported by the District Council. It is recognised that such buildings are often unsuitable for their original purpose following changes in agricultural methods and techniques of production. In addition to barns, former uses could have been mills, granaries and stable blocks. There are also other buildings with different uses which may offer opportunities for re-use.
- 6.21 The most suitable new uses will be those which enable the building to make a continuing contribution to the local economy such as employment leisure or tourism. The District Council will resist conversions for residential use unless this relates to the provision of tourist accommodation or to meet the needs of agricultural or forestry workers. Where such buildings are converted to residential use of this kind, it is important that the converted building continues to make a visual contribution to the landscape, which is not prejudiced by the alterations that have taken place.
- 6.22 Whilst accepting the need for some detailed changes to adapt the building to a new use, the conversion proposals should ensure the retention of the character of the original building, as far as possible. This can be achieved by retaining existing wall openings, architectural features and the original roof line. There should be no additions such as dormer windows, decorative features or chimneys. New openings in the walls should reflect the character of the building.

#### *Stables, Riding Schools and Horticultural Establishments*

##### **POLICY AG5**

**PROPOSALS FOR STABLES, RIDING SCHOOLS AND HORTICULTURAL ESTABLISHMENTS SHOULD NORMALLY BE LOCATED WITHIN EXISTING SETTLEMENTS. EXCEPTIONS MAY INCLUDE PROPOSALS ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING FARMSTEADS**

- 6.23 There has been an increase in the number of proposals connected with the growth of horse riding as a leisure activity. This has arisen over recent years, with increasing affluence and greater amounts of leisure time available to a large proportion of people. In addition, there has also been an increase in various types of development associated with horticultural activity.
- 6.24 In order not to undermine the policies which protect the open countryside the District Council will control demands for uses of this nature and will, wherever possible direct them to existing settlements or sites associated with existing farm buildings. (Also see policy AG11).

#### *Agriculturally Related Activities in the Countryside*

##### **POLICY AG6**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT NORMALLY BE GRANTED FOR AGRICULTURALLY RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE UNLESS IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT ALTERNATIVE SITES DO NOT EXIST IN NEARBY BUILT-UP AREAS, OR THAT SUCH A LOCATION WILL PREJUDICE THE EFFICIENT OPERATION OF THE ENTERPRISE**

- 6.25 Agricultural engineers, haulage contractors and agricultural equipment suppliers are examples of the types of use which service the agricultural community, but which are not intrinsically "agricultural" in their nature or appearance.

- 6.26 The policies of this Plan provide for a presumption, in general, against non-essential development in the open countryside in order to protect its character. This should apply equally to agriculturally related industries, as to those wholly unconnected with agriculture. There is no justification for locating the majority of such uses within the open countryside when more suitable sites exist within built-up areas, which are equally convenient locations for meeting the needs of the agricultural industry.
- 6.27 Agricultural service industries which in exceptional circumstances require to be located close to agricultural production, and where it can be demonstrated that such development cannot reasonably take place on land allocated for commercial development, are likely to be permitted, provided they comply with the other policies of this Plan.

*Agricultural Dwellings in the Open Countryside*

**POLICY AG7**

**IN THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE, PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT BE GRANTED FOR THE BUILDING OF NEW DWELLINGS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THOSE DWELLINGS REQUIRED FOR THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY. THE DESIGN, MATERIALS AND SITING OF PROPOSED NEW DWELLINGS WILL BE REQUIRED TO BE SYMPATHETIC WITH THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE AND THE SIZE COMMENSURATE WITH THE SCALE, NATURE AND VIABILITY OF THE AGRICULTURAL/FORESTRY ENTERPRISE**

- 6.28 It is desirable that dwellings for such activities should be located within villages. Where this is not possible, it will be preferable to identify suitable buildings in accordance with policy AG4.
- 6.29 In exceptional circumstances the construction of a dwelling in the open countryside will be justified, where it is an essential requirement as a result of the particular needs of an agricultural or horticultural holding, or surrounding area of afforestation.
- 6.30 The aim of this policy is to minimise new residential building in the countryside in order to protect its open character. In establishing the need for a dwelling, it will be necessary to demonstrate the agricultural, horticultural or forestry needs, rather than the personal needs of the intended owner or occupier of the dwelling. This assessment should be made on the basis of:-
- (i) the need for employees to be accommodated within the confines of the unit;
  - (ii) the viability of the activity;
  - (iii) the labour requirements of the holding;
  - (iv) the availability of existing residential accommodation close to the operation;
  - (v) the local availability of suitable accommodation; and that
  - (vi) the scheme meets all other planning and highway requirements.
- 6.31 Planning applications will need to be accompanied by a supporting justification demonstrating that an agricultural need exists. To ensure that permitted dwellings are retained for the purpose originally approved, the District Council will impose restrictive occupancy conditions.

**POLICY AG8**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL NOT NORMALLY BE GRANTED FOR APPLICATIONS TO RELAX A RESTRICTIVE OCCUPANCY CONDITION, UNLESS IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT THE DWELLING IS SURPLUS TO THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF THE ENTERPRISE. IN ADDITION, THERE MUST BE EVIDENCE CONFIRMING THAT ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO MARKET THE SURPLUS PROPERTY FOR A REASONABLE PERIOD, AT A VALUE WHICH REFLECTS THE RESTRICTIVE OCCUPANCY CONDITION**

- 6.32 In assessing planning applications which seek the removal of agricultural occupancy conditions, the District Council will need to be satisfied that the circumstances have changed to the extent necessary to justify consent.

- 6.33 Qualifying cases may, for example, involve a change in the size and management of the agricultural holding, leading to related dwellings becoming surplus to the needs of the enterprise. In such cases, it is likely that the owners will seek to dispose of unwanted surplus assets. The District Council will require evidence that the dwelling is surplus to the current and foreseeable needs of the enterprise and that genuine attempts have been made to market the property for a reasonable period, which should normally be not less than 12 months.

*Replacement Dwellings in the Countryside*

**POLICY AG9**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS IN THE OPEN COUNTRYSIDE ON A ONE FOR ONE BASIS, PROVIDED:-**

- (I) THE ORIGINAL DWELLING HAS NOT BEEN ABANDONED OR ALLOWED TO FALL INTO A STATE OF DERELICTION AND DISREPAIR, SO THAT ANY REPLACEMENT WOULD IN EFFECT BE TREATED AS A "NEW" DWELLING;**
- (II) THE ORIGINAL DWELLING IS NOT A TEMPORARY OR MOBILE STRUCTURE;**
- (III) THE ORIGINAL DWELLING IS NOT OF ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC MERIT (WHEN RESTORATION AND RENOVATION WILL BE PREFERRED TO REPLACEMENT);**
- (IV) THE REPLACEMENT DWELLING IS LOCATED ON THE SITE, OR WITHIN THE CURTILAGE OF THE ORIGINAL DWELLING; AND**
- (V) THE REPLACEMENT IS NORMALLY OF A SIZE AND SCALE SIMILAR TO THAT OF THE ORIGINAL DWELLING**

- 6.34 The District Council will consider the replacement of dwellings in the countryside favourably, provided that the original use of the structure to be replaced has not been abandoned, by virtue of condition or subsequent use. Replacement schemes should be of a similar scale to the original dwelling and of a design appropriate to the rural surroundings.

- 6.35 The policy will be implemented on a strict one for one basis and may not be approved where hazardous traffic conditions are incapable of improvement (e.g. an obscured vehicular access point).

- 6.36 A strict policy of this kind is needed in the open countryside. This is because where a dwelling has been demolished or has collapsed because of its state of dereliction, any new building work would in effect lead to the creation of a new dwelling. Permission should therefore be refused, in accordance with the overall aim of maintaining development restraint in the rural area, in order to safeguard the character of the countryside.

*Catteries, Dog Breeding and Boarding Establishments*

**POLICY AG10**

**PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DOG OR CAT BOARDING ESTABLISHMENTS PROVIDED:-**

- (I) THE PROPOSAL DOES NOT REQUIRE THE PROVISION OF NEW RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION;**
- (II) ACCESS, ON SITE PARKING AND SERVICING ARRANGEMENTS SATISFY THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL;**
- (III) THERE IS NO ADVERSE EFFECT ON NEARBY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES BY REASON OF NOISE, SMELL OR GENERAL DISTURBANCE; AND**
- (IV) THE DESIGN AND LOCATION OF KENNELS AND OTHER STRUCTURES MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THERE IS NO ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE**

- 6.37 Planning permission may be required for dog or cat breeding establishments, although this will depend on the purpose and scale of the activity. Permission is always required for boarding facilities.
- 6.38 Dog boarding is an activity which can create problems because of the associated noise and general disturbance which often occurs. It is also an activity which requires to be provided in association with residential accommodation and other buildings and facilities.

### *Garden Centres*

#### **POLICY AG11**

##### **PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GARDEN CENTRES PROVIDED:-**

- (I) THE PROPOSAL DOES NOT REQUIRE THE PROVISION OF NEW RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION;**
  - (II) ACCESS, ON SITE CAR PARKING AND SERVICING ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE PROVIDED TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THERE IS NO ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE HIGHWAY NETWORK;**
  - (III) THE PROPOSAL CAN BE SATISFACTORILY RELATED TO THE SURROUNDING USES AND TO THE CHARACTER OF THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN GENERAL; AND**
  - (IV) THE SATISFACTORY DESIGN AND LOCATION OF ANY BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES CAN BE ACHIEVED**
- 6.39 A garden centre is the type of activity which is likely to generate a great deal of vehicular movement. It is also a use which would probably require full time on site residential accommodation. For these reasons, it will need to be associated with an existing house.
- 6.40 The activity is likely to be more acceptable in the rural area if it is confined to the sale of plants which are grown locally. The sale of items such as timber products and structural materials and the extensive use of greenhouses for plant growing will not normally be supported. Large areas of covered structures can have a considerable and potentially adverse effect on the character of the rural area, whether within a settlement or elsewhere.

### *Mobile Canteens*

#### **POLICY AG12**

##### **PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MOBILE CANTEENS IN LAYBYS OR ROADSIDE LOCATIONS PROVIDED THAT:**

- (I) THERE WOULD BE NO ADVERSE IMPACT UPON ROAD SAFETY;**
  - (II) THE PRIMARY FUNCTION OF THE LAYBY AS A PARKING/STOPPING PLACE WOULD NOT BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED, AND**
  - (III) THERE WOULD BE NO ADVERSE IMPACT UPON THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT OR THE AMENITIES OF NEARBY LAND USERS**
- 6.41 It is recognised that roadside canteens provide a service and a source of employment. problems can arise and this may result in action being taken to secure their removal using the powers of the Planning or Highway Acts.

- 6.42 The stationing of a canteen is development requiring planning permission although, in practice, operators rarely seek permission before setting up. This policy therefore, is aimed primarily at securing the removal of canteens established without permission which are creating problems. Should applications be submitted for the provision of canteens, however, they will be determined taking into account the above criteria. Policy TR6 establishes criteria which govern the provision of service facilities on the trunk road and A road network in the District.