

SECTION 2 - GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND STRATEGY

THE DISTRICT OF EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

- 2.1 As a result of the re-organisation of local government the East Northamptonshire District Council came into being on 1st April 1974.
- 2.2 The District covers an area of 50,979 hectares (125,974 acres) and the population is approximately 68,000. Of this total, 50,000 live in the towns of Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough, Oundle, Raunds, Rushden and Thrapston. The remaining 18,000 live in the 51 Parishes of the rural area representing 26% of the total population. In 1961, 17,197 people lived in the rural area, but at that time this represented 33% of the total population.
- 2.3 Rushden is the largest of the towns and its prosperity was originally based on the boot and shoe industry. In recent years the industrial base has diversified considerably, although the footwear industry is still important economically. A major fire occurred in 1771 which destroyed much of the original town and few old buildings survive today.
- 2.4 Higham Ferrers is a smaller settlement which has merged with Rushden to form a continuous built-up area overlooking the Nene Valley, astride the A6 and A45 roads. Higham Ferrers is one of the oldest towns in the county and was also a centre of the footwear industry. The town centre still reflects the time when Higham Ferrers was a small market town. It now has an important Conservation Area, and a Town Scheme which provides grant aid for repairs to historic buildings.
- 2.5 Irthlingborough also has a long history and traces of Iron Age settlements have been discovered around the town. Both the boot and shoe industry and iron-ore extraction were of importance in the past. Mining operations have ceased and the economic base is now more diverse with food the biggest industry.
- 2.6 There is also a long history of settlement at Raunds. Archaeological excavations have uncovered important sites in the area dating from several different periods including Roman, Saxon and Medieval. Recent estate development has changed the character of the town and many residents travel elsewhere to work.
- 2.7 Oundle is an historic market town which is famous for its public school founded in the sixteenth century. The town has maintained its role as a local commercial centre. Oundle also has an important Conservation Area, and a Town Scheme which provides grant aid for repairs to historic buildings.
- 2.8 Thrapston is a small market town which accommodates the main offices of East Northamptonshire Council. Mineral working, especially gravel extraction, was important in the area until recently. The town also has a role as a commuter settlement due to recent large scale housing development.
- 2.9 Modern agricultural methods have greatly influenced the character and appearance of much of the countryside in the District, but considerable landscape variations exist, ranging from flat open countryside in the eastern part of the District to the undulating countryside of the Welland Valley in the north-west. The valleys of the Rivers Nene and Welland provide some of the most important and attractive features.
- 2.10 The villages vary considerably in size and character. Some have a high proportion of new development and have grown in size accordingly. Most are smaller and more compact and have retained their traditional appearance. A few are very small and sparsely laid out.
- 2.11 A number of the villages are important in architectural or historic terms. There are presently twenty two with Conservation Areas - although more may be designated in the near future. Some of the villages also have important associations with historical characters or events. There are more than 1,500 buildings both in the towns and villages, which are "listed" because of their historical or architectural importance. The District is richly endowed with fine churches.
- 2.12 A variety of building materials have been traditionally used in the area including stone, clay pantiles, Collyweston stone slate, Welsh slate and thatch. In the eastern and southern parts of the District red and yellow brick becomes more dominant.

- 2.13 Areas of woodland include Forestry Commission plantations but also the remnants of the ancient Forest of Rockingham, which once covered the entire area between the valleys of the Rivers Nene and Welland. There are also parklands associated with large country houses. Several former airfields, which were originally developed at the time of the Second World War, are also to be found in the area.
- 2.14 The recent expansion in sand and gravel extraction has resulted in the creation of large bodies of water formed on completion of the workings which were then allowed to flood. Although this has provided more opportunities for water-based recreational activities and some important wildlife sites; it has changed the nature of much of the landscape of the Nene Valley.
- 2.15 Agricultural land is graded, based on the productive qualities of the soils. Much of the land in East Northamptonshire is Grade 3 (moderate to good quality) and has limitations on agricultural use. There is a smaller area of Grade 2 (good quality) which is easier to use. Farming is mainly arable but mixed farming also occurs.
- 2.16 The District is well served by major road routes. The A14 (M1-A1) link was fully opened in summer 1994 and provides a link between the West Midlands and the East Coast Ports.
- 2.17 Parts of the A45 (Birmingham-Ipswich) A6 (London-Inverness) A43 (Oxford-Market Deeping) A605 (Higham Ferrers-Whittlesey) A47 (Birmingham-Great Yarmouth) and A6116 (Thrapston-Corby) main roads pass through the District.
- 2.18 British Rail main lines are within easy reach at Kettering, Wellingborough, Huntingdon and Peterborough.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND GENERAL PLANNING ISSUES

- 2.19 In recent years there have been marked development pressures apparent in the District. These have occurred as a result of improvements in the communications network and development restrictions elsewhere, particularly in the South-East. The pressures eased during the 1990's as a result of the national economic recession. As the economy recovers it is anticipated that they will increase once more.
- 2.20 The attractive rural nature of the District together with its pleasant towns and villages and proximity to major growth centres (particularly Peterborough, Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots, Kettering, Wellingborough, Northampton, Bedford and Milton Keynes) means that it is seen as a desirable area in which to live.
- 2.21 Strategic policies of urban growth and rural restraint have been operating for many years. They have acted as a control mechanism in limiting the total amount of population growth and housing development that has occurred, particularly in the villages and countryside.
- 2.22 In common with other parts of the country, numbers of households are increasing much faster than the growth in total population. This together with the demands arising from people moving to the area, has resulted in a general increase in housing prices. Despite fluctuations in the housing market this has led to difficulties for some local people in obtaining accommodation. Changes in national housing policies have reduced the availability of low cost rented accommodation, which has also created problems for those people who wish to obtain housing locally.
- 2.23 Structural decline in traditional local economic activity particularly in the agricultural, boot and shoe and associated industries, has to some extent been offset by the growth of new commercial development in both manufacturing and services. Although the level of unemployment is low the degree of self containment is also low. Many people commute to work in centres outside the District where there are more varied job opportunities. This is leading to some residential areas and settlements becoming "dormitory" in character. Commuting is wasteful of scarce non-renewable resources. It increases traffic levels on the rural road networks and in towns. The advantages that arise from strong community links are also prejudiced by the growth of this trend.
- 2.24 Modern agricultural practices, the extraction of sand and gravel, land and drainage developments and the impact of visitors, have all had an effect upon the nature, character and appearance of the countryside. This is in terms of both landscape quality and its role as a natural habitat. There is now a strong need to protect unspoiled areas and provide for the improvement of those that have been degraded.

- 2.25 The historic built environment is a scarce resource which is strictly finite in quantity. Once lost it can never be replaced. It provides the special character, "sense of place" and continuity to community life. In this country tourism is one of the fastest growing industries, arising from the survival of much of the nation's heritage. The growth of tourism must be carefully controlled. This is so that pressures from large numbers of visitors do not lead to congestion and excessive commercial developments. If unchecked this would result in destruction of the character of the area. Expansion in a carefully balanced form, however, can result in positive benefits occurring.
- 2.26 Improvements in the economic wealth of the local population have led to increased leisure demands. These are pursued by virtue of formal provision in the form of playing fields, sports centres, golf courses and water-based activities. In addition there are casual activities carried out informally, for example walks in the countryside. Some activities create special problems for example motor cycle trials/motocross, radio-controlled power models and power boating/water skiing.
- 2.27 East Northamptonshire provides a rich resource for the pursuit of a wide range of recreational activities, by both visitors to the area as well as the local population. These activities have to be carefully controlled in order to reduce any adverse impacts that could arise.
- 2.28 The quality, design and layout of some recent development in East Northamptonshire, suggests there is a need for standards to be improved in the future. The general policies of this Local Plan, together with the District Council's adopted parking standards and guidelines for new housing developments and landscaping are intended to help resolve this issue.
- 2.29 High costs of development land together with the desire by many developers to maximise returns has resulted in many intensive schemes coming to fruition. In addition, the uniformity and standardisation of building materials together with application of standard design formulae have led to the development of "anywhere" buildings. These often appear alien in the context of settlements which have evolved gradually using simple design solutions which respect the scale and character of their surroundings.
- 2.30 In common with practice elsewhere, many property owners in East Northamptonshire resort to the products contained in standard catalogues when purchasing materials to improve their properties. In addition, manufacturers use high pressure sales techniques to sell building products and national companies adopt corporate identity styles. This results in the application of the latest mass produced "heritage" or "modern" design features. The effect is the destruction of simple detailing and form which gave the building its original character. Some terraced properties where unity when first built resulted from a repetition of design and detailing features, have now become a jumble of trends and styles, which give a harsh and disjointed visual impression today.

STRATEGY

1. General Needs of the Public

- 2.31 The main purpose of this Plan is to ensure that land and buildings are provided to meet the needs of all the people living and working in the District. Also considered are the needs of people visiting and travelling through the District. An important aim is to maintain and improve the quality of life of all the people in the area, as well as helping in the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 2.32 These aims cannot be implemented by the District Council alone. The whole range of public and private agencies and organisations need to work both independently and together, in order to achieve the desired results.
- 2.33 The planning system plays a part by controlling and directing the type, location and distribution of facilities, as well as influencing standards of design and development.
- 2.34 In general terms the proposals of the plan are intended to meet the needs of people in the District as a whole. The needs of specific groups are also taken into account whenever necessary.
- 2.35 Society is composed of groups and individuals with different needs and priorities according to factors such as age, sex, ethnic origin, disability and income.
- 2.36 Young people need gardens in which to play, a safe and clean street environment, convenient play areas, cycle routes, and facilities for community based recreational and cultural activities.

- 2.37 Young adults require affordable dwellings, employment opportunities and sport, leisure and recreational facilities.
- 2.38 A good range of shops, employment opportunities, schools, a pleasant environment, leisure facilities and a choice in housing will be some of the features desired by families and adults.
- 2.39 Elderly people will seek suitable accommodation designed to meet their needs and a range of local services and facilities close to their residence. In addition streets and transport systems which enable them to move around freely and safely will also be helpful to them.
- 2.40 Women in particular will benefit from a greater choice in employment, the provision of facilities for child care and streets and housing areas which are well lit at night and therefore safer and more secure.
- 2.41 Disabled people will benefit if there is provision of support and care facilities and the built environment is designed to permit freedom and safety of movement.

2. Economic and Social Development

- 2.42 The District Council is keen to take advantage of the economic and social benefits that are apparent in the area and which will influence future development opportunities.
- 2.43 The completion of the A14 (M1-A1) link road has improved the connection of the District to the strategic road network of the Country. There are now direct links to the West Midland Conurbation and the East Coast Ports with their strong European links. Improvements to other routes will further increase the accessibility of the District.
- 2.44 The availability of land for both housing and commercial development creates opportunities for local firms to expand and new firms to move to the area. The pleasant towns and villages and attractive countryside give rise to a potentially high quality of life, which is important to firms and their employees.
- 2.45 Whilst promoting the development potential of East Northamptonshire, the District Council is keen to maintain the social and economic well being of all its existing communities. The policies of the Plan are intended to balance these aims.

3. Protecting the Environment

- 2.46 There is a high quality natural and built environment in East Northamptonshire, which could suffer if development pressures are met, without taking steps to protect and safeguard these finite resources.
- 2.47 The policies of this Plan aim to ensure that the natural resources of the District are conserved and that the environment is protected and enhanced.
- 2.48 The District Council intends that the policies of this Plan will aim to ensure that all new development is sustainable. This means it should meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It will only be possible for this aim to be achieved if new development is located in a way which reduces the need and demand for travel, and/or wherever possible, permits the use of those transport modes which minimise energy consumption and the generation of CO₂ and other harmful emissions or pollutants.
- 2.49 Therefore the need to protect and enhance the environment will not be considered as being subsidiary to satisfying social and economic needs and aspirations. New development will therefore need to make full and effective use of existing urban land or local centres in rural areas. These then will be strengthened by being able to continue to offer a range of community, employment, and shopping opportunities. A high quality environment is important to the morale and well being of the local communities of the area. It will help in attracting inward investment and encouraging tourism. This will also help in creating new jobs. Conservation and development will therefore be in partnership not in competition.

4. *Urban Concentration and Rural Restraint*

- 2.50 Provision for new development will be made on the basis of a Strategy which concentrates this in the urban areas and at the same time ensures rural restraint overall. The aim is to create the opportunity for the towns and larger villages to become once again more balanced as well as self contained social and economic communities. This will help to manage and reduce the demand and need for unnecessary and energy wasting car trips. It will also provide the basis for future improvements to the provision and development of alternative travel patterns and modes of transport. New financial and administrative arrangements may emerge to facilitate this process of change.
- 2.51 Most new development will occur in, or adjacent to the existing towns. In the rural areas development will be constrained. In order to maintain the economic and social well being of these areas, however, some development will be needed. This in the main, will be directed to the selected "Limited Development Villages".
- 2.52 Qualitative factors are important and the Plan includes policies which will encourage high standards of design and layout, with provision to accommodate traffic and enable it to flow freely in a safe and efficient manner.
- 2.53 In order to minimise travel costs it is important to relate new residential development to existing and potential jobs. Policies are included to control development if imbalances occur in the future.

GENERAL POLICIES

POLICY GEN1

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED PROVIDED THAT THE DEVELOPMENT WOULD NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT UPON THE DISTRICT'S NATURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES, LANDSCAPE QUALITY OR THE BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (GRADES 1, 2 AND 3A). DEVELOPMENT WILL NORMALLY TAKE PLACE WITHIN OR CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING SETTLEMENTS

- 2.54 This general policy stipulates the general principle of approach when considering all forms of development.

POLICY GEN2

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA ARE SATISFIED:

- (I) THE DEVELOPMENT IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA IN TERMS OF ITS LOCATION, USE, SCALE, SITING, LAYOUT, DESIGN, DENSITY AND MATERIALS;**
- (II) THE DEVELOPMENT HAS FULL REGARD TO THE NEEDS OF SECURITY, CRIME PREVENTION, PUBLIC SAFETY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY (IN TERMS OF LOCATION, ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE);**
- (III) THERE IS COMPLIANCE WITH THE CAR PARKING STANDARDS (SEE APPENDIX 5). ACCESS, MANOEUVRING, SERVICING, FACILITIES FOR PEDESTRIANS, CYCLISTS AND DISABLED PEOPLE, ARE ALL IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE LOCAL HIGHWAY AUTHORITY;**
- (IV) THE EXISTING ROAD NETWORK IS CAPABLE OF ACCOMMODATING THE TYPE AND NUMBER OF VEHICLE MOVEMENTS GENERATED BY THE ACTIVITY, IN TERMS OF ROAD SAFETY, AND THE EFFECT ON LOCAL AMENITIES ARISING FROM NOISE, DUST, FUMES AND GENERAL DISTURBANCE;**
- (V) THERE WILL BE NO ADVERSE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECT BY REASON OF NOISE, VIBRATION, DUST, SMELL OR OTHER FORMS OF POLLUTION;**
- (VI) FULL REGARD IS PAID TO THE RETENTION OF EXISTING TREES AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES, AND NEW LANDSCAPING IS PROVIDED TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL;**

- (VII) OPEN LAND, IMPORTANT TO THE FORM AND CHARACTER OF TOWNS AND VILLAGES IS RETAINED;
- (VIII) THE DEVELOPMENT WILL HAVE NO ADVERSE EFFECT UPON THE SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA, SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST, OR OTHER SITES OF ECOLOGICAL OR GEOLOGICAL INTEREST;
- (IX) THE DEVELOPMENT WILL HAVE NO ADVERSE EFFECT UPON THE CHARACTER AND SETTING OF LISTED BUILDINGS, CONSERVATION AREAS, HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS, ANCIENT MONUMENTS OR AREAS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST;
- (X) THE DEVELOPMENT CAN BE PROVIDED WITH THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE;
- (XI) FULL REGARD IS GIVEN TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF AGRICULTURE AND THE NEED TO PROTECT THE BEST AND MOST VERSATILE AGRICULTURAL LAND (GRADES 1, 2 AND 3A) FROM DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS IRREVERSIBLE; AND
- (XII) FULL REGARD IS GIVEN TO THE NEED TO SAFEGUARD KNOWN MINERAL RESOURCES

2.55 The above criteria will be considered when determining all planning applications, submitted to the District Council.

POLICY GEN3

PLANNING PERMISSION WILL BE GRANTED FOR RESIDENTIAL, BUSINESS OR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDED THAT THE INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES AND AMENITIES MADE NECESSARY BY THE DEVELOPMENT ARE IN EXISTENCE, PROGRAMMED, OR WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE DEVELOPER.

IF PROVISION BY THE DEVELOPER IS NECESSARY, PLANNING CONDITIONS OR FORMAL PLANNING AGREEMENTS WILL BE UTILISED AND WILL APPLY:

- (I) WHERE SUCH PROVISION IS NEEDED TO ENABLE THE DEVELOPMENT TO COMMENCE;**
- (II) WHERE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION IS REQUIRED TOWARDS THE COST OF PROVIDING FACILITIES IN THE NEAR FUTURE;**
- (III) WHERE SUCH PROVISION IS SO DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND THE USE OF THE LAND AFTER ITS COMPLETION, THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OUGHT NOT TO BE PERMITTED WITHOUT IT;**
- (IV) WHERE IT IS NECESSARY TO SECURE A BALANCE OF LAND USES, IN THE CASE OF MIXED DEVELOPMENT; OR**
- (V) WHERE IT IS NECESSARY TO OFFSET THE LOSS OF, OR IMPACT ON, ANY AMENITY OR RESOURCE PRESENT ON THE SITE PRIOR TO DEVELOPMENT**

2.56 Direct public sector resources to bring about development are limited and it is anticipated that the private sector will implement many of the Local Plan's development proposals. Developers will have a role to play in providing works associated with their project such as infrastructure improvements, environmental enhancements and in meeting community needs arising from their schemes.

2.57 Central Government Guidance is given in DOE Circular 16/91 on the benefits which may reasonably be sought in connection with the grant of planning permission.

2.58 Appendix 6 lists examples of Infrastructure, Service and Amenity requirements which developers may need to fund in new development.