

2. CONTEXT OF THE PLAN

2.1 In recent years significant changes have occurred worldwide in relation to environmental policy and the concept of sustainability or sustainable development. The planning system has been increasingly seen as an essential and legitimate vehicle through which to influence and secure, by land-use development and change, the wider aims and objectives of sustainable development. Some background to this is essential in helping to understand the Structure Plan, which has been founded on the principles of sustainable development and has sustainability at its core.

2.2 The Structure Plan has similarly been influenced in its content and approach by National and Regional Planning Guidance generally, which has itself become increasingly centred on the achievement of sustainable development. Additionally the County Council has in the course of preparing the Plan undertaken several studies (some in conjunction with other authorities), and prepared several reports to inform the Plan strategy and content (see paragraph 2.29).

International Context

2.3 The concept of sustainable development started to be more widely acknowledged with the publication in 1987 of the Brundtland Commission report. This set out the most commonly used definition of sustainable development:

“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

2.4 It was however the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, commonly known as the ‘Earth Summit’, which heralded the most significant step forward. At the Summit, many countries signed up to a commitment to Agenda 21, a

process which seeks to enhance the working together of the community, (including Local Authorities, business, voluntary groups and the public), in achieving an integrated approach to social, economic and environmental issues.

2.5 The UK Government committed its Local Authorities to facilitating the Agenda 21 process and in July 1994 the former Hereford and Worcester County Council signed up to the declaration on sustainable development. It convened a Local Agenda 21 Forum, and worked with the community, District Councils, agencies and organisations to produce a Local Agenda 21 Action Plan. The Action Plan endorsed the County Council’s aims to achieve sustainable development and the Action Plan has been subsequently endorsed in principle by Worcestershire County Council. The development of the Action Plan has had a direct influence on the approach to, and content of, the emerging Structure Plan and in helping to develop the Plan’s guiding principles.

National Context

2.6 In 1994 the Government published ‘**Sustainable Development – the UK Strategy**’, which set out the future agenda in securing sustainable development for Government, organisations, business and individuals. Since then successive Governments have made clear their intentions to ensure that development and growth are sustainable and have developed policies which are consistent with the concept of sustainable development. In this respect the planning system is seen as playing a major role. This includes policies within development plans such as the Structure Plan.

2.7 In early 1998 the Government published a Paper entitled ‘**Opportunities for Change**’. This was a consultation paper on a revised UK Strategy for Sustainable Development reflecting changes that had taken place since 1994. The Paper set out the

Government's vision of sustainable development and what it is doing to put it into practice; explored further action which might be taken to achieve sustainable development; and asked questions on how to proceed in a variety of areas. The consultation led to "a strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom" entitled **A Better Quality of Life (Cm 4345)** published in May 1999. The strategy set out four objectives for achieving sustainable development:

- social progress which recognises the need of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

2.8 In addition to the drive for sustainable development, the Government is equally committed to ensuring that the communities are as free from crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour as possible. This is demonstrated by the introduction of the '**Crime and Disorder Act**' in 1998 which places a statutory responsibility on all tiers of local government to participate in the reduction of crime and disorder in their area.

Section 17 of the Act states:

"Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area."

2.9 The national context for land use planning is provided by **Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), Circulars, White Papers, and Ministerial Statements**. In recent years several PPGs have been revised to make explicit reference to the need to secure sustainable development and to specify particular approaches which are considered to be appropriate to the achievement of sustainable development and crime reduction.

2.10 PPG1 General Policy and Principles (February 1997) sets out a sustainable planning framework, stating that it should:

- provide for the nation's needs for commercial and industrial development, food production, minerals extraction, new homes and other buildings, while respecting environmental objectives;
- use already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work;
- conserve both the cultural heritage and natural resources (including wildlife, landscape, water, soil and air quality) taking particular care to safeguard designations of national and international importance;
- shape new development patterns in a way which minimises the need to travel; and
- when considering the design of proposed new development, take into account the advice contained in DoE Circular 5/94, 'Planning Out Crime'. In doing so, the approach adopted should be sufficiently flexible to allow solutions to remain sensitive to local circumstances.

2.11 PPG3 Housing (March 2000) requires local planning authorities to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable and special housing needs. In so doing priority should be given to promoting more sustainable patterns of development by concentrating additional housing development within urban areas, by making more efficient use of land through the reuse of previously developed land, by adopting a sequential approach to the allocation of land for housing and by managing the release of land. Additionally sustainable patterns of development should exploit and deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education and health facilities, shopping, leisure and local services. Authorities should seek to promote good design in new

housing development in order to create attractive, high-quality living environments in which people will choose to live. Essentially the PPG reinforces and sets out in more detail the Government's approach to the creation of sustainable patterns of development first brought forward in 'Planning for Communities of the Future' (see paragraph 2.17).

2.12 PPG6 Town Centres and Retail Development (June 1996) places emphasis on a plan-led approach to promoting development in town centres, on a sequential approach (i.e. a preference for development first in town centres, then edge of centre and only then in out-of-centre locations) to selecting sites for development for retail, employment, leisure and other key town centre uses, on the promotion of mixed-use development and on the importance of a coherent town centre parking strategy in maintaining urban vitality.

2.13 PPG10 Planning and Waste Management (September 1999) provides advice on how the land use planning system should contribute to sustainable waste management through the establishment of a planning framework which enables adequate provision to be made for waste management facilities to meet the needs of society.

2.14 PPG12 Development Plans (December 1999) re-states the Government's approach to sustainable development set out in "A better quality of life, a strategy for sustainable development in the UK (1999)" (see paragraph 2.7 above) and confirms that development plans in particular can make a major contribution to the achievement of the Government's objectives for sustainable development. The PPG stresses the importance of integrating sustainable development and transport and land use policies in development plans.

2.15 PPG13 Transport (March 2001) provides advice on the integration of transport and land-use planning, with the specific aim of reducing growth in the length and number of motorised journeys, encouraging alternative means of travel which have less environmental impact, and hence help reduce reliance on the private car.

2.16 The Government White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport' (July 1998) sets out new policy initiatives which seek to create a better, more integrated transport system which is sustainable in the long term and achievable through a range of measures which aim to maximise accessibility by alternatives to the car.

2.17 The Government Policy statement 'Planning for the Communities of the Future' (Command 3885 February 1998) sets out the Government's preferred approach to the creation of sustainable patterns of development. This includes:

- making existing urban areas more sustainable or by creating sustainable patterns of new development;
- using opportunities to relocate uses that attract a lot of people; and
- locating more homes in places that are more accessible to public transport, jobs and services.

2.18 In order to specify the most appropriate forms of development, Local Planning Authorities are expected to explore the order of preference for the location of development and the sequence in which development should take place. That is, adopt a sequential approach to development.

2.19 The Government White Paper 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance' (November 2000) sets out policy initiatives for urban areas. Those with land use planning implications include better planning and design and bringing brownfield land and empty buildings back into constructive use.

2.20 The Government White Paper 'Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England' (November 2000) sets out the Government's vision for the countryside with the aim of sustaining and enhancing the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English Countryside.

Regional Context

2.21 Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands covering the period 1991-2011 was first issued in September 1995. At the time, however, the Secretary of State requested that the Local Authorities reconsider the housing figures in the light of the 1992-based household projections and submit advice to him on whether any alterations to Guidance were required. Following receipt of this advice the Secretary of State re-issued Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11) in April 1998. Substantial changes were made to the section on Housing, including a change in relation to the possible role of new settlements in helping to meet the housing needs of the region.

2.22 RPG11 sets out that development and regeneration are essential to achieve economic growth which generates the wealth and resources which are a key factor in maintaining and protecting the quality of the Region's environment. It reinforces the need for the planning system at all levels to ensure that development is sustainable.

2.23 RPG11 is founded on four development principles (paragraph 3.3):

1. **The promotion of economic growth** through maximising economic potential within a sustainable development framework; adopting policies which allow a flexible and efficient response to the needs of the market; and the use of energy-efficient modes of transport and the maintenance and improvement of inter and intra-regional communications;
2. **Support for urban and rural regeneration** by maximising the use of sites within the urban fabric which are derelict or no longer used (previously developed) and releasing greenfield sites only where there is no alternative; promoting a healthy rural economy whilst integrating the development which is necessary to sustain that economy with

protection of the countryside; ensuring the vitality and viability of town centres; and aiming to provide adequate housing to an acceptable standard for all;

3. **The promotion of a sustainable pattern of development** by siting development at locations highly accessible by public transport; moving towards a better balance between employment and population; encouraging mixed-use within settlements; and conserving natural resources;
4. **Maintenance and enhancement of the environment** by ensuring development is carried out in an environmentally sensitive manner; promotion of a high quality of design in town and country; protection and creation of valuable open space; and ensuring a strong, effective and permanent Green Belt.

2.24 RPG11 sets out specific guidance in relation to the key strategic areas which the Plan has to address. In particular it provides guidance on the number of dwellings to be provided within Worcestershire during the period 1991-2011 (41,300 dwellings) and establishes a locational framework for development. The cornerstones of the locational framework which have had a major influence on the development strategy set out in this Plan are:

- Development Plans should recognise the importance of integrating transport and development with locations for new development chosen so that they will help to reduce the number and length of journeys to work, shops, leisure and recreation, education and other facilities especially by car (paragraph 3.6);
- Development Plans should ensure that the capacities of existing urban areas are maximised in so far as is consistent with securing quality of the living environment. Development within the existing urban fabric contributes to a pattern of sustainable development by helping to reduce the need to travel; minimising the loss of greenfield sites;

and maximising the use of existing infrastructure. Opportunities for the reusing of vacant and derelict sites within the urban fabric should therefore be taken unless the retention or creation of open spaces is important to the quality of the environment (paragraph 3.8);

- the siting of new development near public transport centres or at selected locations along corridors well-served by public transport could make a helpful contribution to providing people with a choice of transport (paragraph 3.16). This corridor approach may be applicable across the Region, but will be of particular relevance in those areas which have close links, in respect of journey-to-work and other factors, to the Metropolitan Area (paragraph 3.17);
- the Metropolitan Area is surrounded by a ring of towns which are important centres in their own right, but which (with their surrounding areas) have close economic, social and commuting links with that area (paragraph 4.4.1). The zone of influence is termed the “**Central Crescent**” and in Worcestershire extends to, and beyond, Worcester City and Kidderminster/Stourport. It includes Redditch, Droitwich and Bromsgrove;
- many members of migrant households from the Metropolitan Area to the Shire Counties will continue to work in the Metropolitan Area and should thus be accommodated in the Central Crescent in order to keep commuting distances at a minimum. A significant proportion of indigenous households will also require ready access to the Metropolitan Area for work and other purposes and provision for indigenous growth should therefore also largely be met in, rather than beyond, the Central Crescent (paragraph 4.4.2);
- employment provision in the Central Crescent should not be at a level, or of a type, which will undermine

regeneration of the Metropolitan Area. However, if carefully matched to the employment needs of the area, it can contribute to a better balance between housing and employment and therefore help reduce commuting;

- outside the Central Crescent part of the County (i.e. south and west Worcestershire) housing growth should be largely confined to that for local needs; whereas employment growth could make a useful contribution to local job opportunities. Such employment growth should generally be small in scale in order that it is largely in keeping with its rural surrounds and does not lead to an increase in demand for housing. In the rural parts of the County the emphasis should be on the diversification of employment opportunities.

2.25 When RPG11 was originally issued in September 1995 it also stated that:

“Large new settlements can provide a sustainable form of development which is preferable to development in the Green Belt or the incremental growth of small settlements. This is an option that may well be appropriate in the particular circumstances of the West Midlands, and the strategic authorities should consider the case for such a form of development against the criteria in paragraph 33 of PPG3 and guidance in PPG13 (paragraph 3.2), as well as the context of the corridor studies ...” [Paragraph 3.15]

2.26 The advice clearly indicated that the possibility of accommodating development through a new settlement should be evaluated before considering taking land out of the Green Belt to accommodate development.

2.27 However when RPG11 was re-issued in April 1998 the advice had changed and it no longer states that new settlements are a form of development which is “preferable to

development in the Green Belt". However it is important to note that PPG2 Green Belts only allows for housing in limited circumstances in the Green Belt (primarily infilling). Other major housing development can only be justified therefore in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that it cannot be accommodated outside the Green Belt in the first instance.

2.28 Additionally the conclusion of the Panel who conducted the Examination in Public of the Plan was that there was no need for a new settlement in the Plan period on the basis of the housing growth figures, and that new settlements should be excluded from consideration (paragraphs 1.60 – 1.61 EIP Panel Report October 2000).

Worcestershire County Council Studies and Reports

2.29 At various stages in preparation of the Plan the County Council has undertaken several studies and prepared reports to inform the Plan strategy and content. These have been undertaken in the context of the wider national and regional guidance set out above and have considered specific aspects which the Plan has been required to address. Separate reports on each of the Studies are available. Studies undertaken include:

- Transport Corridors Study
- Urban Capacity Study
- New Settlements Study
- Major Investment Sites Study
- Sustainability Appraisal of Development Options

Background Reports were also produced on:

- Housing
- Employment Methodology