



CORE STRATEGY

ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER

May 2006

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1. INTRODUCTION AND FORMAT

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW PLANNING SYSTEM

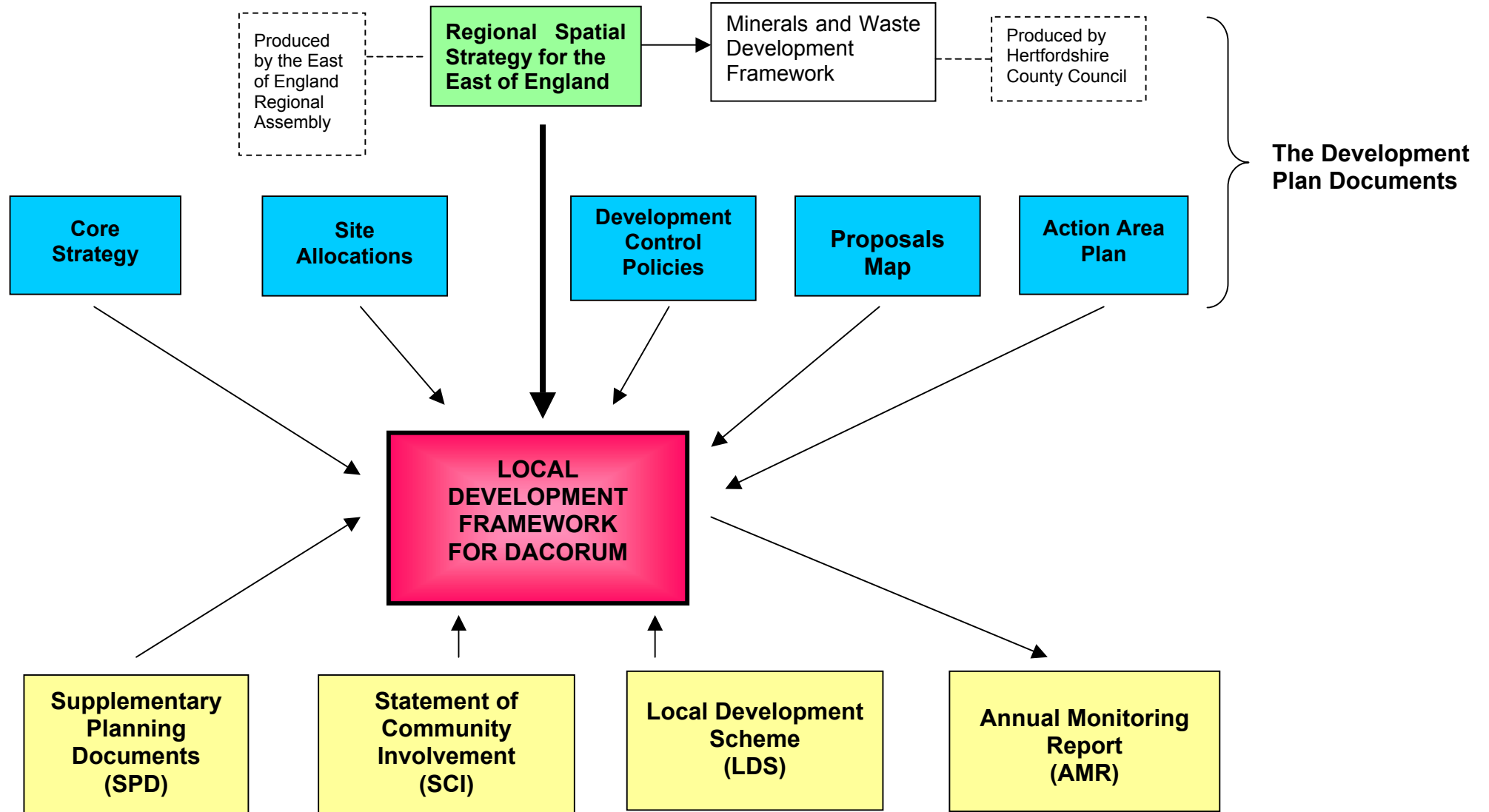
A **new planning system** has been introduced by the government which seeks to achieve a more integrated spatial approach to planning for meeting future needs with more effective community involvement throughout the process. The new system is expected to be able to respond more quickly to changing circumstances over the lifetime of the planning documents.

The new system will be based around a new regional level plan, known as The East of England Plan which is being prepared by the regional assembly. This will replace the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan and will set the overall planning policy framework on issues like housing levels, economic development and transport.

The new plan for Dacorum will be very different to the existing Local Plan. The Dacorum Borough Local Plan will be replaced by a new document known as the Local Development Framework (LDF) which will set out the Council's policies for development in the Borough up to 2021. The LDF will consist of a number of documents, each with a different role. The range of documents is illustrated in the diagram overleaf. This document is the **Core Strategy** and is the first document in the LDF to be prepared.

We are required to take into account both the Council's and Hertfordshire's Community Plans to ensure that identified community needs are included in the process.

STRUCTURE OF DACORUM'S LOCAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK



THE CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy is the most important document in the LDF as it sets out the framework for planning policy for Dacorum. The other development plan documents will be set within this broad framework. The **Core Strategy** focuses on the strategic pattern of development over the next 20 years, setting out the broad areas for development and the overall planning strategy. It does **not** deal with specific sites or detailed development control issues as these will be covered in other parts of the LDF i.e. the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD), Development Control Policies DPD and the Action Area Plan for East Hemel Hempstead Town Gateway.

The consultation arrangements for the Core Strategy process are set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

This consultation is on the Issues and Options stage of the Core Strategy. Your views and comments are being sought on the issues that we have identified from the work undertaken so far that need to be covered in the Core Strategy. We have set out any potential options that we will consider to address these issues. However, alternative options have not been identified unless they are genuinely considered to be alternatives.

This is a preliminary stage in the process of preparing the core strategy and further consultation will be undertaken once the views from this consultation stage have been considered and preferred options identified. Overall, the preparation of the Core Strategy is not expected to be completed until Summer 2008. The development of other parts of the LDF will start in the meantime and overlap with the Core Strategy, so there will be lots of consultation being undertaken. A detailed programme for preparing the different parts of the LDF can be found in the Council's Local Development Scheme.¹

FORMAT OF THE CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy Issues and Option Paper consists of a number of different chapters, all of which follow a similar format and layout. Other chapters are:

2. The Broad Context
3. Vision and Objectives
4. Sustainable Development
5. The Settlement Development Strategy
6. Housing
7. Employment
8. Retailing
9. Transport and Infrastructure
10. Community Development

¹ This can be viewed at the Council Offices or the Council Website www.dacorum.gov.uk/planning

11. Landscape, wildlife and biodiversity
12. Monitoring and Implementation

You are invited in this stage of consultation to respond to the questions set out in this paper by using the attached questionnaire. You will have an opportunity to respond to more detailed proposals in the next stage of consultation on the preferred options report.

2. THE BROAD CONTEXT

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the Dacorum Local Development Framework to conform to national and regional planning guidance and any other relevant strategies, including the Community Strategy.

The national planning guidance comprises of 25 Planning Policy Guidance Notes, though Planning Policy Statements are gradually replacing these. They cover a wide range of topics for example, Green Belt, housing and renewable energy.

Regional planning guidance is currently set out in Regional Planning Guidance Note 9. However, this is in the process of being replaced by the East of England Plan that is being prepared by the East of England Regional Assembly. This should be finalised in summer 2007. It sets the overall level and broad location of development within the region. In its draft form, it proposes to provide 478,000 dwellings overall in the region, with 6,300 dwellings to be provided in Dacorum in the period to 2021.

The Dacorum Community Plan provides a vision for the Borough based around the key needs and priorities of local residents, businesses and other organisations. It has been prepared by a partnership of organisations known as the Local Strategic Partnership. These organisations reflect different interests within the local community, including for example, town and parish councils, the Primary Care Trust and the police. The Hertfordshire Community Strategy priorities and objectives also need to be taken into account. The LDF is one of the mechanisms that will help to implement the actions identified in the Community Plans. However, proposals in the LDF should be consistent with national and regional planning guidance.

These above documents shape the framework for Dacorum's LDF. More detail on the guidance provided by the national, regional and other strategies is explored within each of the individual chapters in this Issues and Options report.

SPATIAL PLANNING APPROACH

Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Statement 1 requires a spatial planning approach to be adopted in the LDF. A spatial planning approach means bringing together and integrating planning policies with other policies and programmes, for example, policies within the Council's Housing Strategy.

A spatial planning approach is seen as fundamental in achieving a framework to deliver sustainable development. The features of a spatial planning approach include:-

- Establishing a clear vision for the future pattern of development, together with objectives for achieving the vision
- Considering the needs and problems of communities and establishing a way of addressing the social, economic and environmental objectives through the planning policies
- Integrating activities relating to development and regeneration and taking account of other relevant strategies and programmes.

Adopting a spatial approach is not straightforward. Planning documents are of necessity looking at the long term trying to balance competing land interests. Often other programmes have to consider a shorter term period and can vary in content over the period of the planning document. The focus of these documents is generally much narrower than in planning documents.

3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

DEVELOPING THE VISION

The Core Strategy will set an overall vision for the LDF giving the aspirations for Dacorum over the period to 2021. The objectives give direction as to how this vision will be achieved.

This vision has been developed following an earlier consultation process undertaken during July 2005 in developing the Hemel 2020 vision in planning for the long term future of the Borough.

PROVIDING THE CONTEXT – OTHER VISION STATEMENTS

1. Strategic planning context

Currently, the draft East of England Plan and the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan both provide context to the Core Strategy. Structure Plans are being phased out under the new planning system but some of the Structure Plan policies have been saved until September 2007 to enable the transition between the old and new planning systems.

The draft spatial vision for the East of England is to

‘sustain and improve the quality of life for all people who live in, work in, or visit the region, by developing a more sustainable, prosperous and outward looking region, while respecting its diversity and enhancing its assets.’

A final version of this document is not likely to be published until mid 2007 and therefore changes to this vision are possible.

The Hertfordshire County Structure Plan vision also remains relevant for now. Its broad vision is for a sustainable Hertfordshire, focussing development in the main urban areas and on previously developed land.

2. The Local Context

The Core Strategy will need to be consistent with the other visions set within the Council itself. In particular, it is required to take into account the key relevant vision of the Hertfordshire and Dacorum Community Plans. These are summarised below:-

Community Strategy for Hertfordshire	Dacorum Community Plan
<p>To improve the well-being of the people of Hertfordshire, today and for future generations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ tackle crime and disorder and improve the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in the Borough. ◆ tackle environmental issues and enhance the natural beauty and built environment of the Borough . ◆ provide a healthier and more caring environment where all people can live a more independent, safe and fulfilling life. ◆ Build a sustainable local economy, supporting business development opportunities and encourage full employment. ◆ Creating a learning community, enabling those who live and work in Dacorum to maximise their potential. ◆ Maximising affordable housing and providing opportunities for people to live in quality homes. ◆ Encouraging a variety of accessible clubs, arts and leisure opportunities and activities. ◆ Responding to the needs of children and young people.

In November 2005, the Borough Council in partnership with other key local organisations, developed a regeneration vision for Hemel Hempstead. This is known as the Hemel 2020 vision. Broadly, it seeks to enhance the quality of life, provide more homes, create new businesses and employment and enhance the environment. It is about raising the profile of Hemel Hempstead over the next 50 years. This work will be particularly important in re-establishing confidence in Hemel Hempstead following the explosion at the Buncefield Oil Depot in December 2005.

DEVELOPING THE CORE STRATEGY VISION

The core strategy vision covers the overall development framework for the Borough and includes sustainable development, housing and design, employment, shopping, transport/infrastructure, community and landscape and wildlife.

Question 1 We have put together below a draft vision for the Borough. Tell us what you think of the proposed vision for the Core Strategy?

The Draft Vision

Working in partnership to:

- establish a planning framework that ensures a high quality of life and a sustainable future for the borough, recognising that some beneficial growth of differing scales will occur in both urban and rural areas.
- Seek the adequate provision of infrastructure in both urban and rural areas, promoting an integrated transport network.
- Create opportunities for a vibrant and prosperous economy across the Borough, focussing on improvements to the Maylands area and re-establishing economic confidence in Hemel Hempstead.
- Enhance Hemel Hempstead's role as the main centre within the Borough, with a thriving sub regional business and shopping hub, improving and regenerating the town centre.
- Protect the countryside, Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Protect and enhance areas of high landscape quality, open space and biodiversity.
- Focus on the re-use of urban sites, using high quality design, including open space provision, to create a safe, quality environment and to accommodate higher density mixed use development in the town centre and in areas of high accessibility.
- Ensure the efficient use of existing land, whilst maintaining the variety and character of the towns and villages, including their historic character.
-

- Make provision for a full range of social, leisure and community facilities
- Promote diversity, equality of opportunity and social inclusion in order to meet the different needs within the community.
- Promote a sustainable use of natural resources.

The Draft Objectives

Translating the vision into meaningful policies requires developing more detailed objectives. The following objectives have been developed following the initial consultation on the vision.

Promoting Sustainable Development and Conserving Resources

- ◆ *Focus development in existing urban centres, maximising accessibility to facilities*
- ◆ *Ensure efficient use of urban land*
- ◆ *Encourage high density development, maximising the use of places with high transport accessibility*
- ◆ *Initiate regeneration of urban sites*
- ◆ *Use previously developed land for new development first*
- ◆ *Implement energy efficiency measures, renewable energy sources, water conservation/sustainable drainage and sustainable construction schemes*
- ◆ *Reduce pollution*
- ◆ *Reduce car use and encourage use of public transport, cycling and walking*
- ◆ *Conserve and enhance biodiversity*
- ◆ *Encourage recycling*

Meeting community development needs

- ◆ *Provide homes to meet local needs, including affordable housing*
- ◆ *Meet leisure and open space needs*
- ◆ *Provide community infrastructure eg. Education and health facilities*
- ◆ *Provide convenient transport opportunities to meet residents needs*
- ◆ *Provide access to goods and services*

Promoting a vibrant and prosperous economy

- ◆ *Balance homes and jobs*
- ◆ *Ensure a range of employment opportunities across the borough for different firms and businesses*
- ◆ *Provide a prestigious landmark employment site*

Creating and conserving quality environments

- ◆ *Create high quality, safe urban developments and spaces*
- ◆ *Enhance and protect the countryside, Green Belt and Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
- ◆ *Conserve local character and identity*
- ◆ *Conserve our historic and cultural heritage*

Question 2

Do you think these are the right objectives for the Core Strategy? Do you have other suggestions?

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT

Sustainable development is wide ranging in nature, embracing policy from transport to energy generation to building construction methods, the use of materials and recycling waste. Sustainable development is therefore a theme that needs to be integrated across the Core Strategy.

Planning Policy Statement 1 – ‘Delivering Sustainable Development’ identifies sustainable development as a core principle underpinning the whole planning system. The widely used definition of sustainable development is ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. This translates into four key aims for sustainable development that are reflected in the Government’s **A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the UK and the Sustainable Communities – Building for the Future and the East of England Plan – RSS14**. These aims are:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Prudent use of natural resources
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment

Good design is highlighted as being integral to delivering safe, inclusive and successful communities. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 ‘Housing’** specifically promotes good design in new housing developments where design, layout and space contribute towards creating a sense of community. In particular, it points out that design considerations should be informed by the townscape and landscape of the wider locality with the local pattern of streets, spaces, building traditions, materials and ecology all helping to determine the character and identity of new development.

These sustainability and design principles are reflected throughout the national planning system. Particular references to tackling issues associated with climate change are included in **Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 – ‘Sustainable Development in Rural Areas’**, **Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 ‘Biodiversity and Geological Conservation’**, **Planning Policy Guidance Note 22 – ‘Renewable Energy’**, **Planning Policy Guidance Note 23 ‘Planning and Pollution Control’** and **Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 ‘Development and Flood Risk’**.

The East of England Plan (RSS14) seeks to conserve and enhance the natural, historic and built environment and protect it from development likely to cause harm; to protect and enhance the countryside and regional and local distinctiveness; to promote a sustainable approach to the use of natural resources (for example, a target is set of requiring developments above

1,000sqm or 50 dwellings to incorporate equipment to provide at least 10% of their predicted energy requirements from renewable energy sources); to protect biodiversity and minimise light and noise pollution. Objective nine in RSS14 is to “protect and enhance the built and historic environment and encourage good quality design and use of sustainable construction methods of all new development.”

Integrating sustainability principles into the Local Development Framework documents and ensuring their implementation will be challenging. The Core Strategy will set out key principles and an overall approach to development that is reflected in the other Development Plan Documents. The key features to include in the Core Strategy policies are considered to be, addressing the causes and potential impacts of climate change and achieving development of a high quality design and includes the other matters listed under A below.

A

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Increasing the use of renewable energy sources, reducing energy use and improving energy efficiency
- Improving air quality and reducing pollution
- Minimising contamination
- Protecting groundwater from pollution and over-abstraction
- Decreasing noise and light pollution
- Protecting the wider countryside in its own right and reducing the impact of development on it
- Protecting and enhancing wildlife, habitats and biodiversity
- Improving the built and natural environment
- Minimising flood risk and promoting the use of sustainable drainage systems to manage run-off
- Minimising waste
- Avoid sterilisation of minerals resources
- Promoting appropriate development locations
- Design developments to reduce crime

❖ ***Issue 1. How can sustainable development be best achieved in the Borough***

The background work in preparing the sustainability appraisal for the Borough has identified a number of key sustainability features for the Borough to consider and take into account in devising future policy. These are listed below.

- Dacorum contains some important areas for biodiversity including a Special Area of Conservation – the Chilterns Beechwoods, 8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 6 Nature Reserves
- The chemical water quality in the Borough is below the average for the region and improving but the biological quality has been declining. There is

currently an over-abstraction of water resources, which is unsustainable in the long term.

- Carbon emissions per capita are lower than the regional average and energy efficiency has improved by nearly 18% over the last 8 years.
- Pollution levels in the Borough are decreasing and are below the average for the region. However, an increasing source of pollution is identified from traffic and congestion. There are increasing levels of light pollution.
- High levels of house building are taking place using previously developed land. 94% was achieved in 2003/4.
- The amount of waste being recycled is increasing, with 28% of household waste being recycled in 2005.
- Deprivation levels in Dacorum are low, with low levels of crime compared to national rates and high levels of employment, though unemployment rates are marginally above the county average.

Question 3

Do you consider that the topics above at A include all aspects of sustainability or are there other topics that should be considered as part of the overall approach to achieve sustainable development?

Question 4

Do you agree that we should seek low carbon energy schemes and seek at least 10% of energy requirements of new development from renewable sources? Should we seek to incorporate these into specific development sites?

❖ ***Issue 2. How can a high quality built environment be achieved?***

Good design is a key element in achieving sustainable development. The Council published an **Urban Design Assessment** in January 2006. This identified the need to produce a stronger more coherent approach on urban design, with an overall policy to help achieve a high quality of development. The principles of good urban design are not only applicable to urban locations. Many are equally valid when considering new buildings and spaces in the more rural parts of the Borough.

A policy would need to provide an overall framework to guide the design of new development. The positive features of a place and its people contribute to the special character and sense of identity of that place. The best places are

those that have a character people can appreciate easily and which are memorable.

New development should not be viewed in isolation from its location. The design and layout of the development should be informed by the wider context, i.e. with regard not just to the neighbouring buildings, but also to the townscape and landscape in the wider locality; this will help create a place that is valued and pleasing to the eye. If local character and distinctiveness are ignored, new development may reflect only the marketing policies or corporate identities of national and international companies, or it may just be a standard product of the building industry. New developments may create their own distinctive identity whilst respecting and enhancing local character. Where there are no identified local traditions or where there is no overriding character, the challenge to create a place of distinctiveness will be greater.

Achieving high quality design will contribute towards achieving wider regeneration, sustainability, resource and economic objectives. The approach should seek to retain and enhance the best elements of the existing environment and ensure that new development is attractive and well designed. The following principles are suggested under B as being important to include in an urban design policy.

B

- Achieving, reinforcing or improving character, coherence and identity
- Achieving continuity and enclosure (in respect of building lines and layout)
- Maintaining and creating open space and greening the environment
- Creating safe, popular, well used places offering variety and choice
- Making the most effective use of resources, eg. including use of local materials and building methods and detailing
- Complementing an area's character, having regard to the historic environment, structure, existing layout, orientation, views, building line, density of existing development and reinforcing a sense of place
- Providing appropriate off-street parking
- the scale, height and massing of the new development in relation to the adjoining buildings, topography, general heights in the area, views, vistas and landmarks;
- the site's land form and character when the new development is being laid out i.e. the development should take note of the shape of the landscape, preserve natural features and take account of the local ecology;
- an attempt to integrate the new development into the landscape (or townscape) to reduce its impact on nature and reinforce local distinctiveness i.e. using structure planting, shelter belts, green wedges, green corridors, common local species in planting

To protect character in special designated areas such as Conservation Areas, further supplementary guidance will need to be provided through

Conservation Character Appraisals. Consideration is being given to creating urban design zones, based upon the updating of existing advice on residential character areas and extending this to include the large villages and employment areas.

Question 5

Do you consider that the qualities listed above at B include all design aspects that should be covered in a broad urban design policy or are there other issues that should be considered?

5. SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CONTEXT

The Development Strategy for Dacorum is guided by both national and regional planning guidance. **Planning Policy Statement 1 `Delivering Sustainable Development`** requires an approach which

- Promotes a positive planning framework for sustainable economic growth
- Promotes urban and rural regeneration, especially by encouraging mixed use development
- Promotes inclusive, healthy, safe settlements
- Brings forward land in appropriate locations to meet expected needs for housing, industrial, retail and commercial development and for leisure and recreation
- Improves access for all for jobs, health, education, retail, leisure, community facilities, open space, sport and recreation
- Ensures new development can be accessed by means other than the car
- Focuses significant development in existing centres
- Promotes the efficient use of land.

Many other relevant issues are raised in PPS 1 that need to be reflected in the LDF but these are raised within the individual chapters.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 `Housing` is in the process of being updated. Currently PPG3 advice is to concentrate most additional housing within existing urban areas. It seeks the maximum use of previously developed land and the conversion and re-use of buildings. Draft **PPS3 `Housing`** expects the LDF to provide opportunities for 5 years supply of housing and to identify broad areas of growth (or specific sites) for a further 10 years. Employment land in particular needs to be carefully examined and where justified in an employment land review, should be considered for release to housing or mixed uses.

The East of England Plan (RSS14) will ultimately set out the framework for the level and pattern of development within Hertfordshire and Dacorum. Its overall strategy was debated at a public examination between November 2005 to March 2006. Any changes will need to be taken into account as the LDF process advances.

Dacorum falls within the London Arc sub regional area. Firm protection of the Green Belt is proposed. There is little scope for expansion without coalescence with other settlements. The focus of development is on the existing settlements, with protection of the open land between them, an

efficient use of existing developed land (pdl) and the promotion of transport demand management measures to deliver sustainable patterns of movement.

Hemel Hempstead is identified as a key centre where development and change will be focussed. Economic development is seen as crucial in achieving a sustainable balance between workers and jobs. For rural areas, development is to be focused in market towns and key service centres, with future development being consistent with local character. In all other rural settlements the level of development is encouraged to assist the rural economy and sustainability of local services.

Flood risk is a significant factor in the eastern region and advice is that new development should be located in areas of little or no risk of flooding (**PPG25 Development and Flood Risk**).

PPS7 `Sustainable Development in Rural Areas` seeks to strictly control new building development in the open countryside. The countryside is to be protected for its character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife and wealth of its natural resources.

A number of key issues have been identified as part of the overall development strategy for the Core Strategy and these are set out below.

❖ ***Issue 1. Where should development be located?***

The Dacorum Borough Local Plan 1991-2011, supports maintaining the current pattern of settlements, with development based upon a settlement hierarchy. A number of greenfield sites, mostly around Hemel Hempstead, are already identified to accommodate future housing development to 2011.

Settlements in Dacorum vary in size and character. Hemel Hempstead is the largest settlement in Dacorum and has the greatest range of facilities and services. It has a number of major redevelopment and regeneration opportunities providing the potential to accommodate a significant proportion of future development within the developed area. This includes the regeneration of the town centre, the Civic Zone, the Kodak complex and opportunities at the Hemel Gateway on Breakspear Way. The Buncefield Inquiry will inform possible development options for Maylands business area and greenfield land at Three Cherry Trees Lane. The Council is commissioning consultants to develop a master plan for the area to encourage regeneration and recovery from the effects of the explosion at the depot and to inform the Action Area Plan for East Hemel Hempstead.

Any opportunities at Berkhamsted and Tring will be smaller scale but again based around redevelopment opportunities that may emerge e.g. Stag Lane development in Berkhamsted (development brief adopted). Other settlements in the Borough may contain other redevelopment opportunities, but these will be small scale and meet local needs.

Overall, this suggests a strategy where growth is focused at Hemel Hempstead, with much smaller levels of development taking place at the other settlements. Two possible options being considered are

1. Concentrate the majority of development at Hemel Hempstead, reducing the role of Berkhamsted and Tring and share the remainder out amongst the other settlements depending upon opportunities arising and size and attributes of the settlement, including the availability and range of services and facilities.
2. Maintain the existing settlement hierarchy in the Local Plan, directing development to Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring. Limited development opportunities to be accommodated at Bovington, Kings Langley and Markyate and small scale development at Chipperfield, Flamstead, Potten End, Wigginton, Aldbury, Long Marston and Wilstone.

Question 6 Which option do you prefer? Or are both acceptable?

❖ ***Issue 2. How do we maintain a good balance between homes and jobs?***

Dacorum has a successful economy with a good range of jobs, largely in the service sector, with a low unemployment rate. It has good levels of entrepreneurship and earnings are high. Most employment is located in Hemel Hempstead, with smaller amounts at Berkhamsted and Tring. It is expected that most significant future employment opportunities are in Hemel Hempstead. A key employment site is identified in the current Local Plan at Three Cherry Trees Lane for high technology uses, though there are uncertainties stemming from the Buncefield Oil Depot incident. The inquiry being undertaken into the incident will have implications on development opportunities on the eastern side of Hemel Hempstead. This will be taken forward in the Action Area Plan for the East Hemel Hempstead Gateway. A potential area for employment development has been identified at Breakspear Way, adjoining the Peoplebuilding development. Other opportunities for employment development exist on the identified employment areas in the Borough and in the town centres. Given the uncertainty and need to rebuild confidence in Hemel Hempstead following Buncefield, retaining a spread of employment floorspace seems prudent.

The provision of sufficient jobs to meet needs is a delicate balance, with complex commuting patterns to take into account. Creating too many jobs fuels in-commuting from other areas, too few jobs leads to more out-commuting. Each can have consequences for the local transport network. However, predicting job growth is difficult and imprecise. However if the focus for future development is Hemel Hempstead, then further economic development here will be likely to be needed to provide a balance between new homes and jobs.

Options are to

1. Support the key centre role of Hemel Hempstead by retaining the key employment site at Three Cherry Trees Lane or an alternative and review its designation for specialised technological uses and retain a spread of employment opportunities throughout Hemel Hempstead.
2. Support the retention of designated employment areas in all main settlements to provide a balance and spread of opportunities and consider if employment sites outside Hemel Hempstead should be expanded to improve the jobs/homes balance.

The outcome of the Buncefield inquiry may impact on the provision of employment opportunities but at this point in time the implications are unknown.

Question 7 Which option do you support?

❖ Issue 3. Protection of the Green Belt

The Green Belt around London is generally 12 to 15 miles wide. Its main purpose is to stop urban sprawl, to prevent the merging of towns and to protect open countryside. The majority of Dacorum Borough falls within the Green Belt and restrictive policies are applied, preventing inappropriate new building and changes of use.

The Urban Capacity Study, published in January 2005, indicates that there is substantial capacity for new housing within the existing urban centres and settlements of the Borough. Together with the greenfield sites already identified in the adopted Local Plan, up to 7,100 dwellings should be able to be accommodated without the need for further encroachment into the Green Belt. This exceeds the current level of development proposed in the draft East of England Plan. However, to achieve this significant development will be required within the existing built up areas. Though this fulfils the national and regional objectives of maximising the use of urban land, it will lead to a changing environment for those already living in the settlements. It is a question of balancing development on previously developed land and already identified greenfield sites versus the loss of Green Belt land?

There are a small number of major developed sites in the Green Belt. The current Local Plan identifies 6 such sites (Ashlyns School, Berkhamsted Hill, Bourne End Mills, Bovingdon Brickworks, Bovingdon Prison and Kings Langley Secondary School). Though they are still subject to Green Belt control, limited infill development is permitted or redevelopment, under the strict criteria set out in Local Plan policy.

To avoid Green Belt losses options are to:

1. maximise the urban capacity within each of the settlements and hold back the greenfield sites identified for development in the current Local Plan as far as possible.
2. try to balance development by encouraging and supporting the development of urban capacity but also bringing forward the greenfield sites alongside this to keep a stream of sites coming forward for development and provide a variety of benefits for the settlements in which they are located.
3. consider additional greenfield sites within the settlements, before any Green Belt release. For example, should the Three Cherry Trees Lane or ex Lucas site on Breakspear Way be reconsidered for additional housing (subject to findings from the Buncefield inquiry) instead of seeking to maximise urban capacity in the Borough's smaller settlements?

Question 8 Which of these options do you favour and why?

❖ **Issue 4. Protection of the Open Countryside**

Beyond the Green Belt there is valuable rural countryside. The countryside around settlements has generally been protected from development. National and regional guidance advocate a continuation of this approach. There are some areas of special landscape. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers northern and western parts of the Borough and is an area where conservation of the beauty of the landscape and the economic and social well-being of the area are the prime planning consideration. The whole Borough is also divided into landscape character areas which are defined in the Landscape Character Assessment (adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in 2004), including the Chilterns AONB. This identifies the particular character features that need to be protected or improved.

Within the open countryside there may be sites that could be classified as previously developed land. Development may be appropriate depending on sustainability considerations. Various types of development are possible eg. meeting local settlement needs or accommodating extensive uses like golf courses.

Question 9 Should limited areas of open countryside around rural settlements beyond the Green Belt be considered for limited development to meet identified local needs?

6. HOUSING

CONTEXT

National Policy

The Government's vision is set out in ***Sustainable Communities – building for the future***. This identifies the key role of planning in creating sustainable communities. Sustainable communities are identified as places where there are decent homes at prices people can afford, clean, safe, green environments, access to jobs and excellent services – schools, health services, shops and parks; and a voice for people in the way their community is run.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 'Housing' promotes well designed, inclusive residential environments, that contribute to urban renaissance, with an emphasis on quality and designing places for people, linked to public transport. A sequential approach to land release is promoted with the redevelopment of existing urban land first. The national target, by 2008, is for 60% of additional housing to be provided on previously developed land and the conversion of existing buildings. Mixed use development is encouraged. Urban capacity studies will identify how much additional housing can be accommodated within the urban areas. Development densities of between 30 – 50 dwellings per hectare are encouraged. Greater densities are encouraged in places with good public transport accessibility.

PPG3 seeks at least five years supply of housing land to be shown on a proposals map. This should be reviewed every five years. In the Government consultation paper on PPS3 'Housing' it is proposed that there should be a 15 year time horizon providing a five year rolling supply of developable land. The position on how much land supply needs to be identified will be resolved in PPS3 once it is finalised.

Regional Policy

The draft East of England Plan (Regional Spatial Strategy 14) currently allocates 6,300 dwellings to Dacorum. No review of the Green Belt boundary in Dacorum is proposed. The Council considers that the housing figure should remain at or below 7,100 dwellings which is the assessed urban capacity plus greenfield sites currently identified in the Local Plan. A Green Belt review may be needed if the figure increases beyond this level.

The strategy requires that affordable social rented housing must contribute 30% of the overall regional housing supply, though 40% affordable housing is possible where justified by a local housing assessment.

LOCAL POLICY

Community Plan

A key objective is to maximise the amount of affordable housing in the Borough. Other issues that will need to be followed up in the LDF include, achieving creative designs and providing housing types that are adaptable and reflect changing social patterns. Working with developers to maximise potential and using urban areas creatively will be needed to achieve this. Better use of the existing housing stock will also assist in making the best use of the land for this purpose.

Dacorum Housing Strategy 2004 -2007

The Dacorum Housing Strategy sets out how housing needs will be met in the Borough. The strategy has five priorities:-

- to identify the scale of current and future need for affordable housing.
- to make the best use of resources to maximise affordable housing opportunities and choice.
- to promote the maintenance and improvement of living conditions of those in the private sector and to uphold the rights of tenants in privately rented properties.
- to deliver housing services that help to create and maintain sustainable local communities.
- to achieve positive outcomes on homelessness.

Dacorum Affordable Housing Strategy 2005 – 07

The strategy identifies the need for more affordable housing in the Borough. One objective is to achieve 350 units of affordable housing over the 3 years. It also seeks lower thresholds for sites in Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted ie. smaller sites would be able to contribute to affordable housing. It considers 20% of homes on new developments should be lifetime homes (flexible adaptable accommodation). Finally, it seeks the highest level of affordable housing possible, with an average of 40% provision on all sites.

❖ Issue 1. The Appropriate Overall Housing Level

There are no currently approved housing requirements beyond 2011. RSS14 proposes 6,300 dwellings, 2001 to 2021, which is a reduction on the current rate set in the Structure Plan and Dacorum Borough Local Plan of 360 dwellings per annum (a total of 7,200 dwellings). Approximately 1,594 homes have already been built since 2001. The Urban Capacity Study identifies potential for 5,994 dwellings (including those built since 2001, those with planning permission, those in the Local Plan and other sites with potential). An additional 1,068 dwellings on greenfield sites are phased for release in the Local Plan largely from April 2006. Overall capacity is therefore assessed as

7,100 dwellings. The Council has accepted that the continuation of about the current annual level of housing development would be reasonable.

As the overall housing figure is uncertain and likely to change, it is appropriate to consider a range of housing levels so they can be tested.

□ Potential Housing Growth Scenarios

The range of potential housing growth Dacorum could be asked to accommodate are considered to be :-

Scenario	Potential Number of Dwellings
A (based on RSS14 proposed level)	6,300
B (urban capacity plus identified greenfield sites)	7,062 (rounded to 7,100)
C (level proposed in original version of ed RSS14)	8,200
D (highest suggested level of development by RSS14 objectors)	10,000

The majority of the housing development is expected to be located in and around Hemel Hempstead.

Question 10 Please list the options in the above table in order of preference from 1 – 4. 1 is the most preferred.

❖ **Issue 2. Sequential Approach**

In accordance with **PPG3**, the Core Strategy should adopt a sequential approach in identifying housing sites. This means giving priority to housing sites within the urban areas and settlements excluded from the Green Belt or rural areas which are, previously developed land; land which may not be developed but is preferable to develop for residential use than maintain for other uses; and greenfield sites in the development pipeline.

The phasing of the sites would reflect the desire to release previously developed land within the urban areas, before greenfield urban extension sites. The detailed phasing of particular sites will be covered in the Site Allocations DPD. Any remaining housing requirement would need to consider greenfield urban extensions and finally around nodes in good public transport corridors. It is not considered that additional greenfield sites will be needed to meet housing requirements of up to 7,100 dwellings.

❖ **Issue 3. Housing Capacity and the Location of New Development in Dacorum**

The Council believes that the figure in the Urban Capacity Study (UCS) of 5,994 dwellings is broadly achievable over the period to 2021. However,

The Urban Capacity Study identifies potential sites within the main urban settlements of the Borough (including Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Tring, Bovingdon, Markyate, Kings Langley, Wilstone, Aldbury and Long Marston). 65% of the identifiable urban capacity is considered to be within Hemel Hempstead (14% in Berkhamsted and 6% in Tring). Other settlements would contribute small amounts of urban capacity over time. Major development opportunities in Hemel Hempstead at the Civic Zone and the Kodak tower complex provide good sources for accommodating further housing growth.

However, at least some of the greenfield sites identified in the Local Plan will need to come forward to ensure the housing land supply. Supplementary planning advice has been published to assist in the preparation of development briefs for these sites. Providing each of these sites can be justified in terms of housing land supply, these sites should be released.

Two possible urban greenfield sites could be considered for potential future housing development and are referred to in the Settlement Development Strategy chapter. Both of the sites are located on the eastern side of Hemel Hempstead and are subject to the outcome of the Buncefield Inquiry. It may not prove possible to take these sites forward but early consideration of their potential is important. The two sites are at Three Cherry Trees Lane and off Breakspear Way. Land off Breakspear Way (the former Lucas Aerospace and Kodak Playing Fields and Caravan Club site) was considered for housing development during the Local Plan inquiry. The Inspector conducting the inquiry concluded the site was inappropriate for housing – a recommendation taken forward by the Council at that time. Either of the two sites would give the Council flexibility in being able to pursue different housing scenarios.

Protecting existing housing from redevelopment to other uses will continue to be important to retain the existing housing stock..

Question 11 Should Hemel Hempstead be the main focus for accommodating housing growth on the basis that it has the greatest scope for urban development and regeneration and access to the greatest range and amount of facilities?

Question 12 Should the remaining housing be proportionally distributed throughout the district to support and expand existing facilities, including in the Rural Area?

Question 13 If the Council are required to plan for housing development in excess of 7,100 dwellings where should it go? (Number 1-4 giving 1 as the highest priority)
1. More housing at higher densities in Hemel Hempstead town centre

2. Greenfield sites within Hemel Hempstead
3. Greenfield sites on the edge of existing settlements
4. Higher densities in residential neighbourhoods (ie. above 50 dwellings per hectare)

Question 14

If further greenfield extensions are needed, around which settlement(s) should they be located (number 1 –5 giving 1 the highest priority).

- Hemel Hempstead
- Berkhamsted
- Tring
- Other settlements outside the Green Belt
- Spread around different settlements

Question 15

Should the key employment site at Three Cherry Trees Lane and or the site at Breakspear Way be considered for residential development either a) now or b) in the longer term?

❖ **Issue 4. Density of New Development**

Using urban land efficiently is encouraged in the existing Local Plan, with a minimum of 65% of development sought on previously developed land. In 2004 the figure achieved was 91%. Many planning applications now coming forward, particularly in Hemel Hempstead, are for higher density development (above 50 dwellings per hectare). A background report on density shows that in Dacorum since 2001 overall density is rising though this is mainly focused in Hemel Hempstead.

Higher density development will, over time, change the character of an area as generally, high density schemes include flats or small units with less amenity space. Higher density can be achieved by locating smaller units on a site eg. 20 flats rather than 10 houses. The higher density flats may actually look to be of a lower density as they can be designed to look like houses. However, there is usually an impact in achieving sufficient parking and amenity land. A careful balance needs to be struck between accommodating residential development within urban areas and the impact this has on the character of an area or settlement. There is some concern that design policies are subordinate to density considerations and therefore the quality of urban design and change in an areas character is not as consistently high as it might be.

Question 16 To achieve growth within the existing urban areas there will be need for further development on, for example, any vacant or derelict land, or intensification of existing uses. Do you agree with this approach?

Question 17 Where should higher density development (ie. above 50 dwellings per hectare) be located?

- Hemel Hempstead
- Berkhamsted
- Tring
- Other settlement - state

Question 18 What safeguards should there be in encouraging higher density development (ie. above 50 dwellings per hectare)?

❖ **Issue 5. Type of new housing**

The Housing Needs Study, 2003 identified the need to develop a balanced housing stock with more accommodation suitable for smaller households in both the private and affordable sectors. Also, with an ageing population there is evidence of significant and growing support needs. Affordability is a major issue particularly for newly forming households both in the private and public

sector. The Dacorum Housing Strategy identifies the need to provide appropriately sized range of accommodation in both sectors.

An assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers in south and west Hertfordshire was completed in April 2005. The study concluded that further accommodation will be needed across the area. The latest Government guidance indicates that provision for sites must be made where a need is identified. The Core Strategy will need to set out a criteria based policy to guide site searches.

Question 19 Should small units be provided to provide a mix of dwellings through ensuring all sites provide a proportion of small dwellings (1 and 2 bed units) and through encouraging conversion of existing properties?

Question 20 Should provision for new gypsy accommodation be planned a) alongside any major new developments or b) should other locations be considered?

❖ **Issue 6. Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing is defined as 'that provided with subsidy, for people who are unable to resolve their housing requirements in the local private sector housing market because of the relationship between housing costs and incomes'. Affordable housing types include housing for rent (either from the Local Authority or a Registered Social Landlord); key worker accommodation or shared ownership. The majority of those seeking affordable housing require rented accommodation which is provided by housing associations.

The Dacorum Affordable Housing Strategy 2005-7 found:-

- affordability is a major issue due to local house price/income relationship, particularly for new forming households
- the population is ageing, with significant and growing support needs
- there is a requirement to develop a more balanced housing stock, with a need for small units in both the private and affordable sectors
- annually 1,346 affordable housing units are needed. The net annual outstanding need is 710 units
- access to home ownership is beyond the reach of 90% of concealed households identified in the survey
- the income level required to purchase the lowest priced accommodation in the Borough is £31,700 (2003)
- 89% of households say their accommodation is adequate for their needs.

The Core Strategy will have to set a target for the level of affordable housing to be achieved over the plan period to 2021. The actual number will need to take into account the housing requirement allocated by the regional strategy.

Different sites can meet a range of differing types and levels of affordable housing. The Housing Strategy suggests that we should seek an average of 40% provision of affordable housing on sites. However, this is not likely to be achievable on all sites. It is difficult to achieve much higher levels as it can affect the viability of a development particularly where there are other development requirements to be met.

Question 21 Should the number of affordable homes sought be proportionally higher on sites which are

1. large
2. greenfield
3. of high accessibility (eg. town centre locations)?

❖ ***Issue 7. Land Use Division in Towns and Villages***

The main settlements in Dacorum are Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Tring, Bovington, Kings Langley and Markyate. The current approach uses defined areas within the towns and large villages as locations suitable for different types of development e.g. housing, employment, open land and town and local centres. This gives greater certainty as to broadly what type of development is likely to be acceptable and the character of an area. It also helps to ensure that land is available to accommodate a variety of uses.

Question 22 Should the approach be a) retained b) applied to any of the other settlements in the Borough?

7. EMPLOYMENT

CONTEXT

National policy guidance in **PPS1 - 'Delivering Sustainable Development'** identifies high and stable levels of economic growth and employment as a key element in achieving sustainable development. It promotes the integration of economic objectives with the achievement of environmental, social and resource objectives. In particular, it seeks the identification in Local Development Frameworks of sufficient locations for economic development.

PPG4 – 'Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms.' requires the full range of development needs for commerce and industry to be met, together with the protection of the environment.

In addition to providing employment space in the larger settlements, consideration must be given as to how to provide employment opportunities in the more rural parts of the Borough. **PPS7 – 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'** requires planning authorities to encourage economic development in different locations, including the future expansion of business premises, to facilitate healthy and diverse economic activity in rural areas. On the other hand, **PPG3 'Housing'** requires local planning authorities to review all their non- housing allocations and consider whether some might be more appropriately used for housing or mixed development.

The **'Regional Economic Strategy'** (RES), published by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), sets out a framework for achieving sustainable economic growth throughout the East of England region. This is reflected in the East of England Plan, known as the **'Regional Spatial Strategy'** (RSS14). RSS14 will set the overall approach for the Core Strategy on issues such as job growth, the provision of strategic employment sites and supporting economic diversity and business development. Importantly, RSS14 retains the concept of a key employment site at Three Cherry Trees Lane in Hemel Hempstead for high technology industry and business by saving Structure Plan Policy 15.

One of the main objectives of **'A Community Strategy For Hertfordshire 2004/10'** is to build a prosperous, inclusive society through economic development. The aim is reflected in Dacorum's Community Plan, **'Dacorum 2015 – A Better Borough.'** Priority Theme 4 seeks easy access to local employment and a flourishing and sustainable local economy to enhance the life of those living and working within the Borough. Whilst this will involve business support and training, it also requires the development and implementation of appropriate policies relating to the designation and location of employment land.

The **Employment Study** (January 2005) examines future employment needs within the Borough, outlining how much land needs to be safeguarded for employment uses over the period to 2021 and judge the potential for any releases to other uses. The key conclusions of the study are as follows:-

- Dacorum can only afford to lose small amounts of office and industrial land in order to make full provision for future employment needs.
- There is likely to be a mismatch between the supply of space provided by large units and the demand for smaller to medium sized units.
- Hemel Hempstead town centre provides a very valuable supply of office space that should be protected.
- Hemel Hempstead is a major centre for employment in Dacorum, with the Maylands business area forming a focus for potential future development

Hemel Hempstead is a thriving New Town that is now more than 50 years old. In looking to the future, the Council is examining how best to ensure the town's future prosperity. A vision for the town known as the '**Hemel 2020 Vision**' sets out a way forward for regenerating the town. Part of the vision is to create a more vibrant town centre and the rejuvenation of the Maylands business area.

The Maylands business area is an economic hub of sub regional importance. Before the explosion at the Buncefield Oil Depot, development of a vision for taking the Maylands estate forward into the future was already underway. The Maylands Task Force was formed to assess how the area could become a more attractive business location. The uncertainty generated by the Buncefield incident has reduced confidence in the town, at least in the short term. The Core Strategy will cover the strategic economic issues facing the Borough, while the Area Action Plan for the eastern side of Hemel Hempstead will help aid and guide the economic recovery. Masterplanning options will be prepared to inform the Area Action Plan.

The key economic challenges in Dacorum are:

- ensuring sufficient land and a range of development opportunities are safeguarded to meet the economic needs of the Borough in the long term;
- promoting confidence in Hemel Hempstead by ensuring a range of appropriate employment opportunities within the town to support the regeneration of the town and further develop its vibrant economy;
- determining the appropriate policy framework to deal with employment sites and land which are surplus to meeting employment needs.

❖ ***Issue 1. How much employment land needs to be retained?***

The Employment Study indicates that in the long term to 2021, sufficient land is available to meet the Borough's employment needs but there is not a significant excess of supply. This indicates that the LDF approach should seek largely to protect the existing employment land supply. It suggests that no

additional new employment sites will be required unless it is to replace existing provision.

The key employment site at Three Cherry Trees Lane is an important part of the current employment land supply and is needed to meet future employment needs. As discussed under 'Settlement Development Strategy,' there are uncertainties relating to the outcome of the Buncefield inquiry as to how much of the site should be developed, and for what types of uses. The Employment Study recommends an alternative location for the key employment site along Breakspear Way at the entrance to the town from the M1 motorway.

The overall loss of the key employment site is not considered to be an option. Ensuring adequate provision of land for employment purposes is essential to provide a reasonable balance between homes and jobs to encourage more sustainable development.

Question 23 Do you support the approach of protecting the existing employment land supply to provide a balance between the future provision of homes and jobs in the Borough?

❖ **Issue 2. Where should economic development be focused?**

The employment land supply is currently identified in the Borough Local Plan and comprises 20 General Employment Areas, 7 Employment Proposal Sites, land within the town and local centres and two employment areas in the Green Belt. This land provides the principal opportunities for meeting the future business and economic needs of local business and the workforce. By far the most important employment area in Dacorum and indeed Hertfordshire is the Maylands business area. Figures show that approximately 16,500 jobs are based there and that 67% of commuting to the town is to this location. Hemel Hempstead is itself a major work destination. Dacorum has a very enviable position in Hertfordshire of having a high proportion of people who both live and work within the Borough (61% of the area's total working population). This has significant sustainability benefits and it is considered desirable to seek to retain this position.

The Employment Space Study highlighted the importance of employment opportunities in Hemel Hempstead town centre. It recommended that the office floorspace in this location should be protected. This approach is consistent with current government advice, which identifies offices as a main town centre use (**PPS6 'Planning For Town Centres'**). The office floorspace in this location has recently been under intense pressure for redevelopment to residential use. However, regeneration of the town centre through the masterplan approach may well present opportunities to retain and improve the employment floorspace offered in this location.

Other parts of Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Tring and Markyate have much smaller economic centres but still contain employment areas with a range of opportunities for local employment. Many of these are under pressure for redevelopment to residential use. It is not considered appropriate to allow significant short term losses of employment land in these areas, especially given the need to provide for a range of both business types and locations across the Borough in the long term. The employment areas are generally performing well, with renewal schemes being undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis. These provide local employment opportunities and help to underpin the service economies of the smaller centres.

Outside of the protected employment land supply there are other isolated pockets of employment, both within the residential areas of the towns and in the rural areas, for example Ebbens Road in Hemel Hempstead. Many of these sites are gradually being redeveloped for other purposes and have often been a valuable source of new housing sites. However, many sites, particularly those located in more rural locations, provide important local employment opportunities and help reduce local commuting. Consideration needs to be given as to whether the current policy approach is continued, or whether these employment sites should be given greater protection. A decision will also need to be made as to whether a different approach needs to be taken regarding the protection of rural employment sites and those isolated sites located within the urban areas.

The current strategy is to ensure that a range of opportunities exist throughout the Borough to provide for the differing needs of businesses and the local economy. This means ensuring a spread of sites across the Borough and across Hemel Hempstead. It is not considered appropriate to generally reduce the spread of employment land to accommodate other forms of development as this would be likely to lead to less sustainable travel to work patterns and reduced economic vibrancy.

Question 24 Should a spread of employment opportunities be retained both across Hemel Hempstead as the major employment centre, and across the other main settlements and the rural area?

Question 25 Should we retain significant employment land within Hemel Hempstead town centre?

Question 26 Do you consider any of the following options appropriate for isolated employment sites either on sites within the towns and large villages or in the more rural parts of the Borough ?

- (a) protected for employment use only
- (b) allowed to come forward for mixed-use development

- (c) allowed to come forward for alternative uses, such as housing
- (d) other (please specify)

❖ **Issue 3. Regeneration and Renewal in Hemel Hempstead**

The Hemel 2020 vision seeks to bring forward a number of regeneration projects to regenerate the town and enhance the quality of life. New proposals for the redevelopment of the Civic Centre, development of masterplans for the town centre, Civic Zone, Maylands business area and East Hemel Hempstead, together with proposals for refurbishment of the former Kodak building will play a major role in the town's renaissance.

The new Riverside development has started the process, providing a department store, restaurants, a hotel and other retail units. A development partner is currently being sought to draw up the detailed masterplans for both the town centre and the Civic Zone areas. The key objective will be to provide for a mix of uses which will include offices and commercial uses, together with environmental enhancements. A development brief has already been adopted by the Council to guide the development of the masterplan for the Civic Zone.

Hemel 2020 seeks to rejuvenate the Maylands business area to achieve a premier business location. The work undertaken by the Maylands Task Force and the preparation of the masterplan will be carried through the Area Action Plan for East Hemel Hempstead and will identify particular uses and sites for development. The mix of uses will need to be very carefully considered but could include limited retail and leisure uses to serve the daytime population.

Question 27 Should we consider if there are any opportunities to provide complementary facilities for the workforce in any of the main employment areas to assist in providing a modern, attractive business environment?

❖ **Issue 4. Live/Work Schemes.**

Live/Work is a form of mixed-use development that combines business and domestic functions within a self-contained unit. There is no national or regional planning guidance on the definition or control of Live/Work space and local demand is uncertain. Government is showing an increasing interest in how Live/Work units may be integrated into the sustainable communities, mixed-use development and affordable housing strategies. Live/Work units could potentially form an important seed-bed for the establishment of new businesses and as such have the potential to make a valuable contribution to the future economic prosperity of the Borough.

Live/Work spaces are only a small specialist aspect of employment land policy and not an alternative for all employment uses. However, they do offer a potential alternative to fully residential development.

Question 28 Should Live/Work schemes be encouraged within the Borough?

8. RETAILING

CONTEXT

Dacorum has a range of shopping centres including the regional centre of Hemel Hempstead, the smaller town centres of Berkhamsted and Tring, and the village centres and neighbourhood centres of the towns. The main shopping areas are complemented by other out of centre food stores, retail parks and scattered local shopping facilities. The catchment area of the borough also overlaps those of nearby competing centres (such as Watford, St Albans and Luton), particularly for spending on non-food shopping.

Current retail policy in government guidance and guidance emerging from the East of England Plan - **RSS14** - will both be important influences on the retail strategy in the LDF. **Planning Policy Statement 6 'Planning for Town Centres'** seeks to promote attractive, lively and prosperous town centres. It has a number of key objectives including:

- Planning for the growth and development of existing centres.
- Promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focussing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.
- Enhancing consumer choice by providing for a range of facilities to meet the needs of the community.
- Supporting efficient, competitive and innovative retail and leisure sectors.
- Improving accessibility, ensuring that existing or new development can be easily reached by passenger transport.

RSS14 emphasises the importance of retail centres and identifies Hemel Hempstead as a regional retail centre. It seeks to focus new development on the existing town centres as a preferred location, and does not foresee the need for any major out of town shopping centres.

'Hemel 2020' sets out the Council's regeneration vision for the town. Part of the vision aims to create a more exciting, thriving, safe and clean town centre. Some key retail outcomes sought are:

- The redevelopment of the civic campus and surrounding land for public services, housing, retail, a performing arts venue and other commercial development, as part of the Civic Zone master plan.
- Providing a suitable mix of uses in the town centre including retail, office, commercial, leisure and retail through the preparation of a town centre master plan.
- Comprehensive enhancement of the town centre covering improved pedestrianisation, relocation of the market, regeneration of Hemel Hempstead Old Town and the creation of a town square.
- Rejuvenating local neighbourhood centres.

- Improved social, commercial (including retailing) and leisure facilities to support the Maylands business area.

Consultants have recently completed a borough-wide retail capacity and leisure study in January 2006. This provides an independent assessment of the likely demand for additional food and non-food retail floorspace and the need for new leisure development. It advises on where such new floorspace might go and reports on the health of the town centres.

The Council is carrying out a study of the New Town neighbourhood centres in Hemel Hempstead. This will look at their future role in terms of shopping and other commercial and community services, and identify key issues and how these might be addressed. The intention is to promote and enhance the centres through tackling anti-social behaviour and crime, improving their physical fabric, identifying local priorities and needs and supporting their continued vitality and viability. Plans for each centre will be prepared on an individual basis and implemented as resources become available.

❖ ***Issue 1. Where should new shopping floorspace go?***

The Retail and Leisure Study completed in January 2006 identifies potential to support additional growth in convenience (food) and comparison (non-food goods) floorspace over the period 2011 to 2021 in the three main towns, with the largest growth in Hemel Hempstead. The work did not identify any pressing need for additional commercial leisure development.

PPS 6 seeks to direct significant new retail development to town centres. This includes shopping as well as major leisure uses (e.g. cinemas, restaurants and theatres), hotels and offices. It sets out a clear order of preference for the selection of sites (the sequential approach) firstly in existing centres, followed by edge-of-centre locations, then out-of-centre sites.

The Council expects that most of this identified need for growth will, in the first instance, be directed mainly to Hemel Hempstead, subject to it being appropriate in terms of scale, character and the role of the centre. There is greater potential for growth in Hemel Hempstead town centre given its size and character and the support for regeneration there, than the smaller town centres of Berkhamsted and Tring.

There may be limited opportunities for new shopping development outside of the town centres. The Local Plan identifies a site at Jarman Fields in Hemel Hempstead for a mixed shopping (including retail warehouses/park), leisure and food outlet(s). Regeneration of the Maylands business area could also offer an important opportunity to create a local shopping and service centre to meet the needs of businesses and the large working population in the area.

It is clear that national planning policy would not normally support an approach that did not seek to focus retail and leisure development within the existing town centres. An approach based on building upon the role of the

existing centres would be appropriate. There is an option of creating a new local shopping opportunity in the Maylands business area and this needs to be explored further in the light of the objectives of the Hemel 2020 vision.

Question 29 Do you agree with the Council's approach to the location of future shopping development?

Question 30 Should an opportunity be made for local shopping in the Maylands business area?

❖ **Issue 2. Retail Hierarchy/Designation of Centres**

The Local Plan identifies a shopping hierarchy consisting of the town centres and local centres, supported by a range of out of centre facilities. The hierarchy provides for a spread of shopping areas and indicates the appropriate scale of development to be directed there. There should be a clear link between any designation and the shopping role of the centre, so as to protect the vitality and viability of all centres.

Out of centre shopping differs from town centres and local centres in scale and character. It offers a narrower range of goods and lacks the variety of supporting services to be generally found in centres. Care needs to be taken when dealing with new development in and the expansion of these non-central sites to prevent them harming existing centres.

A shopping location like Jarman Fields contains a range of facilities that may justify it being included in the retail hierarchy in its own right.

Question 31 Do you agree that the shopping hierarchy should reflect the current roles played by each of the centres?

Question 32 Do you think the Council should recognise the role of modern out of centre developments within the shopping hierarchy?

❖ **Issue 3. Out of Centre Retailing**

The majority of retail warehouses and retail parks (e.g. Apsley Mills Retail Park) are to be found in Hemel Hempstead outside of defined centres. They complement the shopping role of the town centre and are popular with shoppers, especially for bulky goods purchases (e.g. white goods, carpets and DIY products etc). The Council has maintained a tight control over their expansion by controlling the type of goods sold there to ensure town and local centres remain attractive for shopping. The retail study indicates that there is no justification for expanding the current provision.

There may be some advantages, in concentrating new retailing warehousing in existing retail parks or adjacent to them in terms of providing clearer

guidance on appropriate non-central locations, creating opportunities for linked trips, and reducing the length of journeys travelled to different facilities. Alternatively, this approach could encourage the expansion of such facilities at the expense of the existing centres and lead to problems of localised congestion.

Smaller free standing retailing and quasi retail uses (e.g. car showrooms/car sales) are also commonly found outside of established centres, such as in the designated General Employment Areas. These are appealing locations to businesses because they offer alternative accommodation to traditional shops, provide customers with on site parking, can be suitable for trade counter uses, and offer the potential to display and store bulky goods. It may be appropriate for companies genuinely operating trade counters and ancillary showrooms to locate in industrial areas.

However, the Council needs to guard against losses of employment land to retail uses in General Employment Areas and the potential harm of permitting unrestricted retailing there through diverting trade away from existing centres.

Question 33 Do you agree that there should be no significant further expansion of retail parks?

❖ ***Issue 4. Mix of Uses in Town Centres***

Government guidance seeks to promote mixed use schemes as an important element of sustainable development. PPS6 specifically encourages diversification within centres for offices, eating and drinking establishments, residential, cultural and leisure facilities etc. Mixed-use schemes can make more effective use of land than single-use developments, and offer the potential (across a site and within individual buildings) to complement existing town centre activities.

Commercial non-shop uses are an increasingly common feature of town centres and are often popular with shoppers and visitors. They can help broaden the appeal of a centre to a wider range of people, boost the daytime and evening economies, and speed up the occupancy of vacant units by widening the choice of potential occupants.

However, we need to maintain an appropriate balance between retail, service, leisure and other uses in the town centres to maintain vitality. For example, too many non-shop uses in parades can lead to ‘dead frontages’, and result in a less compact shopping area. Moreover, a proliferation of certain types of food and drink outlets can have an adverse effect on local amenity in terms of noise, smells, disturbance, litter and anti-social behaviour, especially if connected to late opening hours.

Offices benefit town centres by broadening their economic base and through workers using the many shops, services and other facilities available there.

They are also important in terms of their contribution to the borough's employment land supply.

Options being considered are:

1. Giving greater flexibility to non-shop uses.
2. Encouraging more mixed-use development schemes.
3. Protecting office uses in town centres.

Question 34 Do you agree that we should seek and maintain a full mix of complementary uses in the town centre?

❖ **Issue 5. The Future Role of Local Centres**

The spread of village and neighbourhood centres in the borough can help ensure that basic shopping needs are met and local services provided, close to where people live. These centres vary from small local parades of shops to larger shopping centres, such as the New Town neighbourhood centres of Adeyfield (Queen's Square) and Warners End (Stoneycroft). **PPS 6** stresses the importance of local shopping in terms of meeting people's day-to-day needs in accessible locations, particularly for socially excluded groups.

While it is important that they remain a local focus for top-up shopping and other community services, these centres are home to other commercial uses. The latter can widen the appeal of a local centre and help support shops there. However, as in the case of town centres, too many non shop uses can lead to similar problems of "dead frontages", detract from the appeal of the centre, and can give rise to local amenity concerns in the case of uses such as takeaways. A difficult balance needs to be made, therefore, between ensuring these centres continue to provide for a basic range of goods and services, and maintaining an attractive centre based on a mix of uses.

Planning policies can only prevent the loss of the shop use. They cannot guarantee the survival of shops or reverse their decline. Whether they are lost or not often depend on many factors outside of planning control, such as the decision of the Post Office to close sub post offices. Rather than simply restricting the loss of shops, there may be greater benefit in seeking to promote a wider range of services and facilities there, developing specialist or new roles for them, and encouraging improvements to its environment. This may be easier to achieve in the case of the local centres owned and managed by the Council.

The Core Strategy will need to consider the most appropriate role of the local centres.

Question 35 Which line should the Council take

1. continue with the existing level of protection to shopping in all local centres in the borough; or
2. support a more flexible approach to non-shop uses in local centres.

9. TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

Transport and infrastructure are the arteries of our way of life. Transport planning and road maintenance are primarily the responsibility of the County Council, through its Local Transport Plan. The Highways Agency is responsible for motorways and trunk roads. Buses and trains are largely run by private companies, with some services subsidised by local authorities.

CONTEXT

The Government guidance in **Planning Policy Guidance Note 13** seeks to integrate planning and transport to:

- Promote more sustainable transport choices for moving both people and freight
- Promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling
- Reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

In order to achieve this, local authorities should:

- Focus major generators of travel demand in urban town and district centres and near to public transport interchanges
- Locate day to day facilities in local centres, so that they are accessible by walking and cycling
- Plan for increased intensity of development at locations which are highly accessible by public transport, walking and cycling
- Use parking policies, alongside other transport measures, to promote sustainable transport choices.

Levels of parking should be kept to the minimum appropriate to the location and use, to encourage the use of alternative modes of transport.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 Housing reiterates the approach of PPG13, but also states that standards regarding roads, layout and parking should be critically examined to avoid profligate use of land. Parking standards have been demanding and applied too rigidly, often as minimum standards. The Government says that developers should not be required to provide more than they or potential occupiers want, nor off-street parking where there is no need. Standards should recognise that car ownership varies with age, income, household type, etc and applied more sensitively.

The Regional Transport Strategy is reflected in the draft Regional Plan **RSS14**. The main principles are to:

- Widen travel choice by increasing and promoting opportunities to use sustainable modes, improving seamless travel through quality interchanges, and raising travel awareness

- Promote the carriage of freight by rail and water and encourage environmentally friendly distribution
- Stimulate efficient use of the existing transport infrastructure.

It sets out accessibility levels for different categories of settlements and parking standards for developments above certain thresholds.

The first Local Transport Plan is being reviewed, and a new plan (**Local Transport Plan 2006/07 – 2010/11**) prepared. Its objectives relate to

- improving road safety;
- reducing the need for movement;
- obtaining the best use of the existing network;
- accessibility for all;
- mitigating the effect of the transport system on the built and natural environments and personal health;
- ensuring the transport system contributes towards improving the efficiency of commerce and industry;
- achieving an efficient, affordable and enhanced transport system which is attractive, reliable, integrated and makes the best use of resources; and
- managing the growth of transport and travel volumes across the County and thereby secure improvements in the predictability of travel time. Dacorum, or West Herts, will be the last part of the County to have an Area Transport Plan.

Area Travel Plans form part of the LTP framework for delivering schemes. Dacorum comprises the West Hertfordshire Area, the last in the programme (2006/7 – 2007/8). Hertfordshire Highways have made initial progress with the town plans for Berkhamsted and Tring. The Hemel Hempstead Transportation Plan (1995) is now time-expired and a fresh look will have to be taken in the light of the major regeneration issues. The greater scale and complexity of traffic movements involved means that consultants will have to be commissioned.

The **Community Plan for Dacorum** refers to creating a cleaner and healthier environment by more people walking and cycling and seeking to maintain and improve public transport to reduce atmospheric pollution. It also seeks to encourage the best conditions for businesses in terms of infrastructure – logistics, transport and utilities.

Dacorum is well located in relation to the M1 and M25, Luton and Heathrow airports, and the West Coast Main Line. It has a higher percentage of the population using the car to travel to work than the County average (ie. 67% compared to 64%). However there are wards around the centre of Hemel Hempstead where over a quarter of households do not have a car (2001 Census). There are currently no parts of the Borough where air pollution necessitates the declaration of an Air Quality Management Area. However as the population and the size of vehicles increases, emissions and number of vehicles may continue to rise.

❖ **Issue 1. Congestion**

Congestion is a key transport priority and concern. Car ownership rates in Dacorum are high at 1.37 cars per household, contributing to congestion. This figure is above that for Hertfordshire as a whole, the eastern region and England. It can affect commuters, passenger transport timekeeping and firms' deliveries, leading to stress and additional costs. It can lead to overspill onto unsuitable local roads. In Dacorum, the Local Transport Plan identifies the M1, A5, and the Chesham Road junction with the A41 as congested. In addition, the A41, A4251, A414 and A4146 are congested at peak times. The route along Breakspear Way, Maylands Avenue, Swallowdale Lane and Redbourn Road is an identified congestion hot spot. In addition, the railway is also used close to full capacity. Given the good accessibility of Dacorum, measures taken to address congestion within the Borough will only have a limited impact on the amount of through traffic.

Congestion cannot be tackled on a single front. A number of measures are needed including the following: -

- Focus development on town and local centres to enable needs to be met locally and reduce the need to travel by car
- Provide new and improved public transport and use bus priority measures on key routes, e.g. park and ride
- Improve cycle and pedestrian facilities including access to town centres, local centres and major traffic generators
- Improve road infrastructure to relieve congestion without attracting more traffic
- Require Green Travel Plans for smaller facilities as well as major traffic generators

Question 36 Which option(s) would help reduce local congestion and can you suggest any others that we should consider?

❖ **Issue 2. Parking**

Parking has become a significant public issue since the introduction of charging and Controlled Parking Zones. It includes on and off-street, public and private, and parking for delivery vehicles, lorries, cycles, motorcycles, and the disabled. Conflicts arise between residents and commuters parking in residential areas; badly or inconsiderately parked vehicles. Whilst more recent developments have had to meet cycle parking standards, town and local centres, schools, business premises and stations often have insufficient or poor quality facilities. Older residential areas, including the neighbourhoods in Hemel Hempstead, lack off street parking, except in unpopular garage courts. Filling stations are becoming destinations for food shopping, and this has led to parking overflows onto the highway in a number of cases. The introduction

of hard standing in front gardens and verges has visual and environmental implications. Government advice is to minimise the quantity of car parking to encourage use of alternative modes. However significant improvements to bus and train services, and cycle and pedestrian networks are also required to make these modes more attractive to persuade the public out of their cars.

Many of the detailed issues relating to parking will be covered in the Development Control Development Plan Document. However, the general approach to parking across the Borough is a strategic issue that needs to be addressed in the Core Strategy. Parking standards in the Local Plan are lower than those in the previous Plan and are maximum standards which gives some flexibility in their application. To be considered is whether there is scope to:

- Reduce car parking standards across the board and identify locations for car-free developments
- Reduce car parking standards in accessible areas only

Question 37 Is there sufficient car parking provision in Dacorum, and should standards be maintained? Is there a need to find additional locations for parking?

Question 38 What improvements could be made to make a reduction in parking standards feasible?

❖ **Issue 3. Accessibility**

Accessibility means being able to reach key services at reasonable cost, in reasonable time, and with reasonable ease. Some of these factors relate to fares and timetables beyond the remit of the Plan. However, the Plan can help by identifying appropriate locations and requiring provision of new bus services, for example. Dacorum is hilly and this might affect the attractiveness of walking and cycling compared to car use.

Attempting to improve accessibility means we need to consider the following options:-

- Encourage high density development near appropriate passenger transport interchanges.
- Ensure low cost and affordable housing is located close to basic amenities
- Encourage provision of live-work units
- Develop Cycle and Pedestrian Route Network and Improvement Strategies
- Consider accessibility for all sections of the community including the disabled

Question 39 Are there any other planning measures that could help improve accessibility?

Infrastructure – Utilities

Government guidance emphasises that existing and planned physical infrastructure including utilities such as water and sewerage, electricity and gas, passenger transport, cycle and pedestrian routes must be able to accommodate the needs of any new development. If the existing infrastructure does not have sufficient capacity, the Council can ask developers of any scheme to meet the costs of providing the necessary facilities or phase construction to match the investment programmes of service providers.

Question 40 Are there particular deficiencies in infrastructure provision that you would like us to be aware of?

10. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT

Planning Policy Statement 1 – ‘Delivering Sustainable Development’ seeks to create socially inclusive communities. Plan policies should bring forward sufficient, suitable land to meet needs for housing, industrial, retail and commercial development and for leisure and recreation, and provide improved access for all to jobs, health, education, shops, leisure and community facilities open space, sport and recreation.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 - ‘Housing’ recognises the need to co-ordinate housing development with other uses. Local planning authorities should create more sustainable patterns of development by building in ways which exploit and deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education and health facilities, shopping, leisure and local services.

Planning Policy Statement 7: ‘Sustainable Development in Rural Areas’ sets out guidelines for planning to support rural communities and businesses, while protecting the beauty and character of the countryside. As part of this it aims to support the provision and retention of rural community services and facilities, including village shops, petrol stations and halls.

Planning Policy Guidance 17: ‘Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation’ indicates the importance of open space, sport and recreation to people’s quality of life and outlines the role that well designed and implemented planning policies can play, supporting urban and rural renewal, promoting social inclusion and community cohesion, health and well being, and promoting sustainable development. Open space, sport and recreational facilities of high quality or particular value to a local community should be protected. Opportunities should be sought to facilities and where planning permission is granted for new development it should be ensured that provision is made for sport and recreation through an increase in the number of facilities or through improvements to existing facilities.

Draft **Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (RSS 14)** provides the planning and development strategy for the region up to 2021. It sets out the background to growth in the eastern region and amongst its objectives is achieving sustainable forms of development, improved quality of life, social inclusion and access to employment, services and leisure facilities.

The Hertfordshire Community Strategy 2004/10 includes objectives to invest in children and young people, through increased learning, play and leisure opportunities, and to promote healthier communities such as improving access to health and social care.

The Dacorum Community Plan 2015 sets out a number of priorities and objectives that the community of Dacorum wishes to be addressed. The Dacorum Community Plan 2015 has nine general themes including those

relating to improving social care and health, delivering life-long learning, encouraging community involvement and responding to the needs of children and young people and improving accessibility to open space.

Hemel 2020 is the Council's vision for Hemel Hempstead. Key community projects proposed to take the vision forward include a new Civic Zone to incorporate new council offices, college, library, police facilities and a new performing arts venue. Health facilities, new college facilities and a new urban park also fall within the Council's aim to deliver the Hemel 2020 vision. Hemel 2020 seeks to enhance these natural and historic environments and to open them up to wider public use. This in turn will raise the overall profile of the town and to help attract new investment into the wider area.

❖ **Issue 1: Overall Provision of Community Facilities**

The provision of social and community facilities are essential to create and maintain a balanced community. The term 'Community Facilities' covers a range of different facilities across the Borough, such as education, health, worship, child care, residential care, open space and environmental services (such as the disposal of household waste). The Borough also contains special community facilities such as the prison accommodation in Bovingdon, which is located within the Green Belt.

A Social and Community Facilities Background Study has examined the current provision of community facilities within the Borough of Dacorum, such as education, health, childcare, elderly care, religious and cultural activities, and seeks to address any issues of need arising from their current use. This study has identified a number of key issues in relation to community development.

As of the 2001 Census, the population of Dacorum comprised some 137,799 people. This represents an increase of 4.2% since 1991. Population forecasts indicate that this growth is likely to continue over the period covered by the Local Development Framework. Increasing population trends will lead to an increased demand for community facilities such as education and health facilities. A mixed demographic, ageing and ethnically diverse population will also lead to changing demands on religious, cultural and care services.

Access to community facilities should be made available for the whole community. They should therefore be located within easy reach of those who need them. This means locating facilities in existing town and local centres or within easy reach of good public transport or within walking or cycling distance. As well as providing new facilities it is important to protect existing community facilities from competing land uses such as housing. Current policy protects the retention of viable social and community facilities but not the pool of land currently used for these purposes as a whole. Some community uses will however cease to operate over the plan period, for example church attendance is in decline and some consolidation of Christian places of worship

may result. One of the key policy issues for the core strategy is therefore whether these premises should be protected and adapted for other community uses.

Question 41 Do you agree that any new key community facilities should be concentrated in the most accessible areas in the main towns and within villages?

Question 42 Do you agree that we should seek to retain and enhance all existing community facilities in town and rural areas? Should we continue to generally protect community premises from being lost to other uses and instead seek alternative community uses when community buildings become available?

Question 43 Should all new housing developments provide a contribution towards the provision of new community facilities to help meet the demands from an increasing population?

❖ **Issue 2: Education Provision**

The Children, Schools and Families (CSF) section at Hertfordshire County Council is responsible for 56 primary schools, 2 middle schools and 9 secondary schools in the Borough, as well as 4 special schools for children with learning or behavioural difficulties. Many schools are currently operating with surplus capacity and as such there is generally considered to be no significant problems in accommodating the school needs associated with much of the anticipated additional growth in the Borough. Some issues are expected with secondary school capacity in the Tring area and primary school capacity in Apsley/Nash Mills. If major housing development were recommended in a particular location, this would most likely impact on a particular school or schools. The CSF is consulted on all major planning applications to indicate the impact of proposed developments on educational facilities. Additional facilities or financial contributions are requested where justified.

Pressures to extend other schools are likely to result from Childcare demands through 'Extended School' rather than educational needs. An 'extended school' is one which provides a range of activities and services beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. This may mean pressures to extend educational facilities within the Green Belt and Rural Area, which may conflict with Open Space and Green Belt designations.

Question 44 Should any additional demand for educational facilities be accommodated by extending or improving existing facilities, using financial

contributions from housing development, where there is a demonstrated need?

Question 45 What role should school sites play in the provision of community services?

Question 46 Should we seek to provide the 'extended school' programme demands at any school facilities or selected schools only?

Question 47 If any surplus school premises are identified over the lifetime of the plan should they be used for alternative social/community or leisure uses or something else?

❖ **Issue 3: Health Facilities**

The provision of health facilities within the Borough falls under the responsibility of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust and Dacorum Primary Care Trust. The Development Plan Documents should make appropriate provision for new health facilities and improvements to existing facilities and should embrace changes in service provision promoted by 'Investing in Your Health' and 'Investing in Your Mental Health'.

The only hospital in the Borough is located in Hemel Hempstead. The land surrounding the premises is reserved in the current Local Plan for its expansion and associated staff accommodation (Proposal site C5). The Hospital is however changing its function and now proposes to downsize over the next 10 years. This may result in increased pressure to allow the land designated for Hospital expansion to come forward for other uses. There is however an identified need for one new doctors surgery in Hemel Hempstead. A mental health care facility and the provision of at least two treatment centres in the Borough are being investigated. This site surrounding the Hospital may be an appropriate location to accommodate these health facilities.

Question 48 Do you agree that we should maintain the existing land designated for the expansion of the Hospital for other health or community uses?

❖ **Issue 4. Overall Provision of Leisure Facilities**

Open land, recreation and leisure facilities help to improve people's physical and mental well-being, to support cultural and community identity and development and to make places attractive in which to live and work.

The **Dacorum Sport and Recreation Study** assesses provision for indoor facilities (published March 2006) and outdoor facilities (programmed for

completion in April 2006). A separate study of Open Space is also near completion. Collectively the studies will identify qualitative and quantitative deficiencies in provision for a range of open space and built recreation facilities and make recommendations to address such deficiencies. The studies may also give rise to other issues that will need to be addressed through the Local Development Framework.

However, the central questions for the Core Strategy are:

- Whether there should be any broad guidance on the amount and location of leisure facilities. The current Local Plan refers to generally accepted standards of provision, that provision should be available for all sections of the community, within a reasonable distance of homes and that provision is appropriate to its environment (eg. Major built facilities should be in or near centres if possible). The principles appear equally valid for the future.
- Whether there are any facilities of town or borough wide importance that should be identified. A performing arts venue is proposed for the Civic Zone in Hemel Hempstead. A town stadium has previously been suggested for Hemel Hempstead and may be worthy of support. It would be a prestigious venue for the town football club and could assist regeneration and diversification of uses in the east of the town.

Question 49 Do you agree there should be broad guidance on the location of leisure facilities and a high priority attached to the provision of leisure facilities?

Question 50 Are there any major facilities you wish the Council to consider for the future eg. Stadium in Hemel Hempstead?

❖ **Issue 5. Protection and Enhancement of Open Space**

Open space in Dacorum includes a very wide range of different types of green space in both the towns and rural area, such as parks, allotments, natural habitats, recreation grounds, playing fields, burial grounds, woodlands, farmland, amenity space and children's play areas. Competing land uses within the borough means that there are various pressures to build on undeveloped open land, highlighting a need to protect and improve our open space areas and consider whether there should be additional provision.

The towns and large villages of Dacorum need a range of leisure space for residents to enjoy sport, play and informal activities. The current Local Plan, sets a minimum standard of 2.8 hectares per 1,000 population in the towns and large villages, based on the National Playing Fields Association Standard of 2.4 hectares per 1,000 population plus 0.4 hectares per 1,000 population for informal parks and ornamental gardens. The standard provides a method of assessing local provision, and is used as a tool for the allocation of extra resources and protection of existing provision.

The Council currently requires that for new large housing developments provision is made for new or extended public open space (including provision for maintenance). The Council is also seeking to rectify existing deficiencies. In many cases, this is impractical due to the built up nature of our urban environment and the difficulty in creating or identifying new areas of public open space. It is therefore important that Open Land is retained because it acts as a reservoir for all open uses and for example, part of a school playing field that is surplus to education requirements could become a public leisure space. Sometimes a financial contribution is agreed towards improving existing areas of public open space and securing new or extended areas for public open space. This is known as a planning obligation (Section 106). PPG 17 states that 'Planning Obligations should be used as a means to remedy local deficiencies in the quantity of open space'.

Question 51 In areas of deficiency we may seek financial contributions towards achieving new provision. Do you think this is the most appropriate means of acquiring and improving access to public open space or should new provision be made in all significant new developments?

Question 52 Should all open space be protected from all types of development ?

Question 53 Do you consider that some open land can be lost to improve the quality of other open space or alternative provision made?

11. Landscape Management and Biodiversity

CONTEXT

Government guidance in **Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'** establishes the clear aim of protecting the countryside for sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the biodiversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the welfare of its natural resources and people to enjoy. The quality and character of the wider countryside should be enhanced where possible. Especial emphasis is placed on the conservation of nationally designated areas, such as the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Landscape character assessment and guidelines, such as that undertaken in Dacorum⁽¹⁾, are encouraged to support the conservation, restoration or improvement of locally valued and distinctive countryside. Higher grade agricultural land⁽²⁾ should be retained for farming in preference to lower grades. Other sustainability considerations, such as biodiversity, the quality and character of the landscape or its amenity value or heritage interest, should also be weighed in the balance of factors when considering the future use of agricultural land. The Government's forestry policy⁽³⁾ promotes the sustainable management and expansion of existing woodlands. The historic countryside and open environment should be protected in accordance with advice in **Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 'Planning and the Historic Environment'** and **Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 'Archaeology and Planning'**. This applies to attractive villages (which are conservation areas), parks and gardens attached to historic houses, historic features of the landscape (such as listed farm buildings or special field patterns) and earthworks, such as ancient fortifications, boundaries and burial mounds which are worthy of preservation (particularly scheduled ancient monuments).

Conserving, enhancing and restoring the diversity of wildlife and geology is fundamental advice in **Planning Policy Statement 9 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation'**. The quality and extent of natural habitats and geological (or geomorphological) sites must be sustained and improved. Full account must be taken of the relative importance of wildlife and geological designations (whether of international or local significance), the natural physical processes which relate and the population of naturally occurring species. Enhancing biodiversity in green spaces in networks in towns and villages and along rivers and canals is valued by people and should contribute to a better quality of life.

Managing the water environment and flood risk sensitively can enhance biodiversity and the landscape. **Planning Policy Guidance Note 25 'Development and Flood Risk'** (and its draft replacement) sets a risk-based approach, protecting the functional flood plain of rivers, and encouraging sustainable drainage patterns and minimising run-off through use of permeable surfaces and vegetation.

The **Community Strategy for Hertfordshire and Community Plan for Dacorum** seek a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable environment. Water resources – including river systems and wetlands – and their management is a particular theme, reinforced by specific proposals for Hemel Hempstead in **Hemel 2020**. The Hertfordshire Strategy refers to the protection and enhancement of all natural assets and seeks to develop measures to address the impact of climate change. The significance of wetter winters is an increased risk of flooding (and possible soil erosion), and drier summers (coupled with over abstraction of water in Dacorum) water shortages with a lowering of the water table. Management of the water environment is important for wildlife.

The draft Regional Plan, **RSS14**, sets out principles for the management of the region's natural, built and historic environment drawn from Government Guidance. The direction – conserve, restore, enhance or extend natural landscape, biodiversity and other assets – is clear.

The current Local Plan covers many of the issues but has no unifying policy on the key environmental assets and how they should be looked after together. It does not expressly address climate change issues. Furthermore with newer advice in **PPS 9**, the commitment to biodiversity should be strengthened, seeking enhancement and extension of habitats.

Our challenge is how to bring the issues together in a coherent land management policy framework for Dacorum.

❖ ***Issue 1. Managing the Countryside***

The countryside is used and managed by people for working and for recreation. Around 11% of the total population of Dacorum live in small villages and wider countryside.

Most of the district is described as Chilterns countryside. The chalk escarpment ridge and outlier at Tring extends towards Wendover and Dunstable (both outside the borough), and the dip slope with characteristic gentle valleys and chalk streams - Bulbourne, Gade and Ver - lies to the south. Soils over the chalk aquifer are of relatively high permeability and susceptible to leaching and groundwater contamination. Part of the countryside is specially designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Chilterns Conservation Board is responsible for preparation of a management plan to promote the conservation of the landscape and natural environment throughout the Area of Outstanding of Natural Beauty. Their management policy supports planting of mixed deciduous woods, rather than simple replacement of the afforested beech, and grazing of chalk downland.

North of Tring is a flat clayland area, part of the Vale of Aylesbury – location of an important population of the rare black poplar. The most fertile agricultural

land⁽⁴⁾ is in this area and Tring Gap⁽⁵⁾, as well as on plateau land east of Hemel Hempstead and south of Bovingdon.

Woodland cover is high compared to the Hertfordshire average⁽⁶⁾. Ancient semi-natural woods at Tring and Ashridge/Berkhamsted Common are of national importance. Small woods in the New Town area of Hemel Hempstead are a particularly important community asset. Nevertheless it should be an objective to increase tree cover from this resource base.

The landscape has been managed and built on for centuries. Some aspects are particularly valued and have protective designations – e.g. Ashridge Management College and Tring Mansion with their parkland and other habitats. An historic landscape assessment being prepared by the County Council may identify other significant features.

The Grand Union Canal – a recreational and wildlife resource – cuts through the Borough, and major reservoirs at Tring support its functioning. Other transport corridors, e.g. M1 motorway, are far more intrusive by contrast.

Dacorum's countryside is a diverse resource and change, such as through past intensification of agriculture, can have multiple effects. Planning can help set a positive and more holistic framework where management policy fosters:

- (1) the right investment for a viable, open and attractive countryside; recognising as priorities
- (2) the need to preserve the most important assets and resources and to enhance biodiversity.

Key management principles could be:

- sensitive development based on landscape character assessments and understanding
- sustainability in the use of soils and water
- enhancement and enrichment rather than degradation
- supporting a variety of natural habitats
- appreciation of historic character.

Question 54 Do you agree with the principles set out for managing the countryside? Are there any others you wish to add?

❖ ***Issue 2. Protecting the most important assets and resources***

Management invariably means change. However there are particularly important assets and resources, which should simply be retained, either for their own sake or as a basis for extending good practice over the wider countryside:

- the natural flood plain and chalk streams
- Grade 2 agricultural land
- designated sites of geological or nature conservation value – i.e. the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Nature Reserves and Regionally Important Geological Sites
- ancient semi-natural woodland
- the natural beauty of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particularly the visually prominent escarpment
- historic landscape features – for example parkland and scheduled ancient monuments
- the Grand Union Canal.

QUESTION 55 Have the most important assets and resources been identified?

❖ **Issue 3. Enhancing Biodiversity**

A rich diversity of habitats and wildlife indicates a healthy landscape and environment and contributes to quality of life.

Legal protection is afforded to nationally designated sites and named species such as bats and badgers. However it is the wider range of habitats and sites that needs protection from development change, management *and* extension to avoid fragmentation and to reverse past degradation and disappearance of species (such as water voles). Important Wildlife Sites have been identified by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.⁽⁷⁾ The list of sites includes all higher level nature conservation designations and represents the critical part of the biodiversity and habitat resource in Dacorum. Management advice is targeted at Wildlife Sites. The list is used for supplementary planning guidance.

While most of the borough might be described as a core biodiversity area in the East of England⁽⁸⁾, the county-wide Biodiversity Action Plan ⁽⁹⁾ only identifies four High (or key) Biodiversity Areas in Dacorum – Ashridge/Berkhamsted Common/Aldbury; Tring Park/High Scrubs; Tring Reservoirs; and the Upper Gade Valley.

Habitats, which are regarded by one source or another as ecologically very important in Dacorum, are as follows:

Habitat	06/2005 (10)	Regional Priority Targets (11)	Significance in Hertfordshire (12)
Chalk Rivers	✓		Highly significant
Lowland beech/yew woodland or semi-natural woodland	✓	Chilterns	Highly significant
Hedges		Whole borough	Significant
Parkland	✓		
Acidic grassland, heath and bracken	✓		Highly significant
Lowland meadows/unimproved neutral grassland	✓		Significant
Lowland chalk grassland	✓		Highly significant
Arable field margins		Claylands	
Swamp/reed beds	✓		Significant

The County Biodiversity Action Plan contains some aspirational targets for habitat re-creation in the wider countryside. The Borough Biodiversity Action Plan ⁽¹²⁾ contains more detailed targets and species action plans: it refers to areas of local wildspace in (and adjoining) settlements and open land in formal recreation use where the nature conservation interest could be enhanced and new habitats created.

The ecological networks and processes that operate through the countryside are essential to support the more common biodiversity and species seen within the towns and large villages. Dacorum Urban Nature Conservation Study ⁽¹³⁾ has identified, from the habitats survey, biodiversity action plans and other sources, a complex resource of ecologically valuable sites, stepping stones, corridors and green wedges through each settlement.

The Urban Nature Conservation Study used English Nature's accessible natural green space standards ⁽¹⁴⁾ to assess the biodiversity resource across the borough. It recommends a strategic approach in the countryside ⁽¹⁵⁾ based on:

- consolidation of the High Biodiversity Areas;
- enhancement of particular corridors (e.g. river valleys); and
- provision of new habitat in deficient areas.

The number of designated sites and Wildlife Sites is limited within settlements. However they are important and should, the study recommends, be supplemented by:

- protection of locally valuable wildspace (old hedgerows/tree lines, water courses, woods and open space); and
- maintenance of links to open countryside.

It also recommends the Council should work towards English Nature's targets for the provision of Local Nature Reserves.

QUESTION 56 Do you support the approach advocated in the Urban Nature Conservation Study of improving and extending biodiversity sites and networks in

- (a) the countryside
- (b) towns and large villages?

QUESTION 57 Are there any specific priorities you wish to highlight?

- Notes
- (1) Landscape Assessment for Dacorum: Supplementary Planning Guidance adopted May 2004
 - (2) Grades 1, 2 and 3a Agricultural Land Classification (MAFF)
 - (3) England Forestry Strategy (1999)
 - (4) i.e. Grade 2 in the Agricultural Land Classification
 - (5) The break in the chalk escarpment between Tring and Aldbury
 - (6) Urban Nature Conservation Study (UNCS) March 2006
 - (7) The Habitat Survey for Dacorum Borough – A Natural Conservation Reference Guide 1997
 - (8) East of England Biodiversity Mapping Project, Map 5: East of England Biodiversity Forum, February 2005
 - (9) A 50 – Year Vision for the Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Hertfordshire: Herts Environmental Forum 1999
 - (10) Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System; Annex C, Habitats of Principal Importance
 - (11) RSS14 – Appendix B
 - (12) Dacorum Borough Nature Conservation Strategy September 2001
 - (13) Herts Biological Record Centre, March 2005
 - (14) Ref Section 2.3, UNCS March 2006
 - (15) Ref Section 4.1, UNCS March 2006

12. MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION

CONTEXT

Monitoring and implementation are critical to an effective Core Strategy. It is vital that we understand whether policies, programmes and targets are actually being achieved, and that we have a system in place to measure this. For example, we need to ensure that the Core Strategy is delivering on its strategic development such as housing, employment, shopping and community facilities.

The new planning act (**Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004**) requires local planning authorities to produce an annual monitoring report (AMR) for the Secretary of State containing information on the implementation of the local development scheme and the extent to which the policies set out in local development documents are being achieved. An AMR has been produced for 2005.

Planning Policy Statement 1 ‘Delivering Sustainable Development’ states that planning authorities should set a clear vision for the future pattern of development, with clear objectives for achieving that vision and strategies for delivery and implementation.

Planning Policy Statement 12 ‘Local Development Frameworks’ sets out a number of key considerations:

- Having a monitoring and implementation framework with clear objectives for achieving delivery.
- The importance of continuous review and monitoring.
- The need to be realistic about resources available for implementing proposals.
- An integrated approach to implementing other relevant strategies e.g. the local transport plan.
- The need to develop a monitoring system to assess the effectiveness of planning policies.

Detailed advice for local planning authorities on monitoring the LDF is given in the **‘Local Development Framework Monitoring: A Good Practice Guide’**. This sets out guidance on the content and preparation of the AMR, identifying a set of core output indicators and suggesting other types of indicators that could be developed.

❖ **Issue 1. Monitoring**

Developing an effective monitoring framework is fundamental to the Local Development Framework (LDF). A clear set of aims, objectives and targets will ensure a consistent basis on which to monitor the LDF over its lifetime. The framework should be structured around the Core Strategy.

The Council currently produces housing and employment land position statements on an annual basis. These provide important baseline data on the progress of development in the borough. The Council also publishes older style AMRs that report on the performance of policies in the Local Plan and development in the borough. The current Local Plan has a set of performance indicators against which to monitor the progress on key Plan objectives, but these are limited in number.

The Annual Monitoring Report will monitor how the Core Strategy is performing in terms of delivering key objectives. This will be the main focus for co-ordinating and improving the monitoring framework. The AMR for 2004/5 identifies key actions:

- Improving the efficiency of our in-house system.
- Developing opportunities for partnership working.
- Extending the range of local indicators.
- Integrating the monitoring with the Community Plan, the Regional Spatial Strategy and Sustainability Appraisals / Strategic Environmental Assessments.
- Developing the evidence base.

Question 58 Do you agree with the Council's approach to monitoring?

❖ **Issue 2. Implementation**

The Council has an important role to play in the implementation of policies and proposals. It needs to ensure they are realistic and achievable over the life time of the LDF and in respect of resources available. The Core Strategy can help to give greater certainty over decisions on and investment in development. However, there are many factors beyond the Council's control that can affect the delivery of development, such as the state of the local and national economy.

The Council has powers in relation to the use of land and buildings. It determines development proposals, controls planning permissions via conditions and legal agreements, and takes enforcement action against their non-compliance and in respect of unauthorised development. To help overcome ownership problems it can assemble land when necessary using compulsory purchase powers. The Council can produce more detailed supplementary planning advice on specific policy matters and development

sites (e.g. development briefs), as a way of influencing delivery. It also has an enabling role through directly funding environmental organisations (e.g. the Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service and the Chilterns Conservation Board) and working in close partnership with developers and other public, private and voluntary agencies.

The delivery of the Core Strategy also depends upon the action and investment of a variety of infrastructure and service providers who are involved with other local strategies and programmes (e.g. the Community Plan). The Core Strategy needs to be consistent with and supportive of these. It must understand the capacity of existing infrastructure and the need for new facilities. It can thus make developers aware of what the identified need is for additional facilities and in what form it should be provided (e.g. through providing it direct or via financial contributions). The Core Strategy can also help co-ordinate the timing and location of development proposals with the infrastructure and spending programmes of such agencies (e.g. the Local Transport Plan) through, for example, the phasing of development.

The existing Local Plan does not have a focus on implementation, although elements of this are to be found in a number of policies (e.g. on the phasing of development, planning obligations and infrastructure provision etc.). A specific policy would have the advantage of bringing together these important elements and to set out a clearer, more integrated, and consistent approach to implementation. It could cover:

- The importance of partnership working to deliver development.
- Better co-ordination and links to spending programmes and the provision of infrastructure and facilities.
- The achievement of key strategic or local policy objectives, including sustainable development.
- Identifying the scale of infrastructure and service needs and likely development contributions.
- The need to phase development and identify land reserves.
- The appropriate use of planning conditions, legal agreements and supplementary planning guidance and advice.
- Promoting land assembly, and if necessarily using compulsory purchase powers to achieve this.

QUESTION 59 Do we need a separate policy on implementation?

QUESTION 60 If yes, do you agree with the principles identified for the new policy?

❖ **Issue 3. Planning Obligations**

A planning obligation (which is also known as a 'Section 106' agreement) is a legally binding contract between a local authority and a developer and/or landowner. It is a mechanism used to deal with the adverse effects of a planning application and is intended to make acceptable development which

would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations are an important means of ensuring development is accompanied by necessary infrastructure and other social and community facilities, either directly or through contributions towards this, for the benefit of the whole community.

Circular 05/2005 provides circumstances under which it would be appropriate to use planning obligations, for example:

- Prescribing the nature of development (e.g. by requiring a proportion of affordable housing).
- Where a development would create the need for a particular facility (e.g. a new or improved road access).
- Compensating for loss or damage caused by a development (e.g. loss of open space).

It sets out five conditions for their use to ensure they are relevant and necessary in planning terms, directly related and in scale and kind to the proposed development, and reasonable in all other respects. The Circular also urges local planning authorities to set out guiding principles as to their use and matters to be covered in the LDF.

While the Government is consulting on the future role of planning obligations and possible changes to them, the purpose of dealing with the impacts of development remains the same. The Council intends to produce additional advice in the form of a Supplementary Planning Document to deal with the more detailed aspects of planning obligations.

If the Core Strategy is clearer as to the type and scale of the likely provision or contribution that is required this can bring greater certainty to the process and ensure a more consistent approach. This will help developers and landowners to make more informed decisions over additional costs they would incur and how this would impact on the development. The Core Strategy can thus benefit from greater certainty over the level and location of development it needs to provide for.

The Council proposes to use planning obligations to achieve some investment in or for:

1. Community Facilities, Health and Safety
2. Education, facilities and support
- 3 Community Safety
4. Affordable Housing
5. Transport and access
6. Habitat creation and landscaping
7. Open space (including facilities in the space and play space)

The type of contribution sought needs to reflect the delivery of key planning objectives, such as the regeneration vision for Hemel Hempstead and the achievement of mixed use developments. Planning obligations also need to be flexible in the way they are used to achieve new infrastructure and facilities. Any approach should be adjusted to suit the scale and circumstances of the development. This means that different forms of contribution may be appropriate, such as the use of standardised contributions or tariffs. Contributions must be directly related to the development and cannot be sought as a form of tax.

QUESTION 61 Do you agree with the Council's approach to planning obligations?

QUESTION 62 Do you think the list of matters to be covered by planning obligations is appropriate?