



# Rural Development Supplementary Planning Document

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## 1 Executive Summary

**1.1** This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will replace the Re-use of Rural Buildings Supplementary Planning Document July 2005. This SPD provides further detail to the policies relating to development within the rural areas of Lichfield District and those areas which also lie within the Green Belt.

**1.2** The SPD includes the context for the rural area and identifies its key characteristics including the relevant planning policies. There are individual chapters on housing, services and facilities, economy and tourism and recreation and leisure which provide greater detail and useful context to the policies within the Local Plan.

**1.3** Within the Rural Housing chapter the detailed policy is set out including the assessment of needs and affordable housing to support applications for new housing on rural exception sites. This chapter also includes guidance on residential care homes.

**1.4** The chapter on Services and Facilities shows how we can assess the sustainability of communities and the impact changes of use and new services and facilities can have on those communities.

**1.5** The importance of our Rural Economy and Tourism is a chapter which emphasises how important investment is and how applications can be supported to deliver a sustainable rural economy.

**1.6** Our diverse countryside and the balance which needs to be achieved to enable the recreation and leisure potential to be fulfilled including what information may be useful to support applications is provided in the last chapter.

**1.7** Included in the appendices is detailed guidance on the specific topics of rural workers dwellings and the re-use of rural buildings, including photographs of examples.

**1.8** The SPD whilst providing more detail than the Local Plan is often no substitute for detailed discussions relating to your specific ideas and proposals. You are encouraged to contact the Development Management team for advice prior to submitting a planning application on 01543 308000 or via the website [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk)

## Introduction

The Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy was adopted on 17th February 2015 and includes policies for which it specifies supplementary planning documents (SPD) will be prepared. This SPD adds further detail to the policies relating to development within the rural area and replaces the Re-use of Rural Buildings Supplementary Planning Document July 2005.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), at paragraph 153, states that SPDs should be used where they can help applicants make successful applications or aid infrastructure delivery. The Town and Country Planning Regulations require the guidance contained within an SPD to be consistent with and not conflict with the adopted Local Plan.

Throughout the preparation of the Local Plan the complexity of the issues within the rural area of Lichfield District became apparent and the need for more detailed guidance than could be included within policies contained in a Local Plan Strategy was identified.

This SPD firstly sets out the legislation and policy context which are relevant to the document. The document then considers the locally relevant key issues and offers further guidance and interpretation for the topics of rural housing, services and facilities, rural economy and tourism and recreation and leisure including agricultural diversification in individual chapters. The document considers the differing contexts for development whether within the Green Belt or within open countryside throughout the relevant chapters. Within the appendices there is useful guidance in relation to rural workers dwellings and detailed guidance with illustrations on the re-use of rural buildings.

The adopted [Local Plan Strategy](#) contains Strategic Priorities. Strategic Priority 2 of the Local Plan is:

To develop and maintain more sustainable rural communities through locally relevant employment and housing development and improvements to public transport facilities and access to an improved range of services, whilst protecting the character of our rural settlements.'

It is important first to identify to which areas of Lichfield District this SPD relates and recognise some of the key issues of these rural areas. The areas beyond Lichfield City and Burntwood are our rural areas and 38.6% of the population of Lichfield District live within them.(ONS mid year estimates 2010).The size of our rural communities varies greatly, with the largest rural settlement being Fazeley (including Mile Oak and Bonehill) with approximately 7,400 residents and one of the smallest being Harlaston with approximately 220 residents. There are many even smaller hamlets, small groups of properties and individual dwellings, (ONS Statistics. Census 2011) Within this range of settlements the [Rural Sustainability Study](#) identified that the larger settlements of Alrewas, Armitage with Handsacre, Fazeley, Shenstone and Whittington provide services and facilities for smaller surrounding settlements, hamlets and isolated dwellings.

Rural residents value the spirit of their communities and the physical qualities of their villages and countryside; The Staffordshire Rural Strategy (contents page) states that 95% of rural residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, however residents are concerned at losses in rural services, the availability of housing to meet their circumstances and in some cases, increasing levels of isolation through poor public transport, (Local Plan

Strategy para 17.3 and Enhanced Joint Strategic Needs Assessment ([EJSNA](#) 2012).

The EJSNA identified that around a third of the District falls within the most deprived 20% nationally, when looking at physical proximity to services. In addition in Staffordshire 66% of lone pensioner households do not have access to car, which impacts upon the services they can access. In Lichfield's largest rural settlements, the percentage of lone pensioners is higher than the county average with Fazeley 14.2%; Shenstone 12.9%; Alrewas 12%; Little Aston 11%; Armitage with Handsacre 10.6% and Whittington 10.4% (EJSNA 2012). This further compounds the risk to the well being of our rural residents and the need to support our rural areas.

The Local Plan seeks to ensure that rural communities are as sustainable as possible, delivering appropriate levels and types of housing to address identified need, retaining rural services and facilities in all the villages, providing new services which are relevant to local needs and supporting communities in delivering initiatives which help them to be more self sufficient is part of the vision of the rural areas. This is supported by the Vision for Rural Areas in the Local Plan Strategy.

Within the rural areas there are generally higher concentrations of larger homes with a smaller than average social housing sector. There are also higher house prices in the rural area than the urban area and great demand for housing of all sizes to meet the housing needs of our rural residents who wish to remain close to their extended family and to support each other.

Within the rural areas the number of facilities is less than in Lichfield City and Burntwood and varies between settlements, as shown by the Rural Settlement Sustainability Study

(2011). The small scale of the settlements is often what residents like most about them and new development beyond the scale and nature of the settlement is not proposed within the Local Plan. However the rural areas have historically been affected by a reduction in the level of services and facilities available locally. The ability to access local services and facilities has an impact upon health and well being of people. Access to food and shops is important and within communities it is important there are opportunities to interact e.g through walking to use facilities such as the local shop or village hall. Social interaction has many benefits within the community and can reduce the fear of crime, levels of antisocial behaviour and promote community cohesion.

The provision of the internet and faster broadband has both helped those with access to the knowledge and tools to use this facility. Initiatives such as 'Superfast Staffordshire' have supported growth in the rural economy and home-working has enabled more residents to remain in the rural area and closer to home during the day and thus helping to support local services and reducing the need to travel and the distance travelled, (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 7).

However within the rural areas access to employment can be especially difficult due to limited employment opportunities and public transport availability increasing costs for those trying to access the job market and those seeking part time work. This particularly impacts upon the young economically active and those on low incomes. Volunteering and local services such as shops and pubs can provide useful first time/part time jobs and references/experience in the working environment.

Initiatives supported by the local community to diversify and strengthen the local economy and provide appropriate facilities to support rural life will need to be balanced against protection of the quality of the countryside and landscape.

For young people access to the outside world is important for growing up and becoming independent e.g. being able to walk to a play area, learning to cross roads and interact with the local population. For the well being of all the population, opportunities to be active through walking e.g. to buy a newspaper are important as it is also not as easy to access leisure centres/swimming pools for formal play/exercise in the rural areas. Local facilities also provide those who commute to work with the opportunity to be part of the community and support their local economy. They provide opportunities for volunteering, supporting local shops and the pub, chance meetings, open garden days, and seeing what services may be available locally such as local gardening services, dog walking, exercise classes and reading groups. The use of local facilities further encourages less use of the car.

Surrounding our rural settlements is open countryside and this provides an important attractive setting to our District. It also has an important economic role. The diversification of sustainable farming enterprise; countryside-based enterprises and activities from farm shops to tourism and the sensitive use of renewable energy resources can strengthen the rural economy. In the Local Plan Strategy the countryside is valued as an asset in its own right and seeks its protection. Of specific relevance is Local Plan Strategy Policy NR1 although the rural area contains important landscapes and various other designations and almost half of the rural area is designated as Green Belt and is subject to specific guidance and policies (Local Plan Strategy Policy NR2).

The importance of accessibility to local services, facilities and housing is recognised in the Localism legislation which enables communities to take control of dealing with local issues in their area. For more information visit [www.mycommunityrights.org.uk](http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk) or [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights)

The District Council offers a pre-application advice service whereby applicants can seek advice from the Council's officers; see the Council's website: [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk) for more information.

## 1 Planning Policy

**1.1** Legislation and Policies relevant to the preparation of this SPD are as follows:

**1.2 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010** – European Directive 92/43/EEC(1) on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, also referred to as the ‘Habitats Directive’. The Habitats Directive requires Member States to take appropriate steps to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats and disturbance of species for which the sites have been designated. There are two SACs within and close to the District which could potentially be affected by additional development, these are the River Mease SAC and Cannock Chase SAC. Local policies to assist developers and prevent harm to the SAC’s have been prepared and are referred to in regard to the Local Plan Strategy.

**1.3 Localism Act 2011** – introduced powers to enable communities a greater opportunity to safeguard community assets, including a Community Right to Acquire, the Community Right to Build and the Community Assets Register. [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights) and [www.mycommunityrights.org.uk](http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk).

**1.4 Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2013** – this amended the regulations, and subject to various criteria and the prior written approval of the local planning authority permits existing agricultural buildings to change to flexible use falling within use class A1, A2, A3, B1, B8, C1 or D2 in the Schedule to the Use Classes Order, this could include a shop, restaurant, office, storage unit, hotel, gymnasium or cinema etc.

**1.5 Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2013** – this

further amended the regulations to include agricultural buildings to become schools, nurseries or change to residential use. Changes of use are still subject to compliance with various criteria and the prior written approval of the local planning authority.

**1.6 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2012)** – sets out the Government’s planning policies and has been used in the preparation of the policies within the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy. Policies and paragraphs not duplicated within the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy which are of particular relevance when considering development in the rural areas include:

**1.7 Green Belt: Para 81** - Local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

**1.8 Para 89** - A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

**1.9 National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)** - sets out additional guidance to the NPPF and sets specific criteria for undertaking sequential tests and impact assessments.

**1.10 Lichfield Local Plan Strategy (adopted February 2015)** - This is an overarching document and will be supported by a Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) which will conform to the policies in the Local Plan Strategy. Together they will form the Development Plan and replace the saved policies in the current Development Plan (the Lichfield District Local Plan adopted in 1998).

**1.11** Policies within the Local Plan Strategy relevant to the preparation of this SPD include:

- Core Policy 1: The Spatial Strategy
- Core Policy 3: Delivering Sustainable Development
- Policy SC2: Renewable Energy
- Core Policy 4: Delivering our Infrastructure
- Core Policy 5: Sustainable Transport
- Core Policy 6: Housing Delivery
- Policy H2: Provision of Affordable Housing
- Core Policy 7: Employment and Economic Development
- Core Policy 8: Our Centres
- Core Policy 9: Tourism
- Core Policy 11: Participation in Sport and Physical Activity
- Policy NR1: Countryside Management
- Policy NR2: Development in the Green Belt
- Policy NR5: Natural and Historic Landscapes
- Policy NR7: Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation
- Policy NR8: River Mease Special Area of Conservation
- Core Policy 14: Our Built and Historic Environment
- Policy BE1: High Quality Environment
- Vision for Rural Areas
- Policy Rural 1: Rural Areas
- Policy Rural 2: Other Rural Settlements

**1.12** These policies seek to develop and maintain more sustainable rural communities through support and diversification of locally relevant employment, provision of housing

to meet local needs and access to an improved range of services whilst protecting the character of the rural settlements. These policies endeavour to protect and enhance the quality and character of the countryside, its landscapes and villages by ensuring that development which takes place is to meet identified rural development needs. These policies are referred to throughout this document.

**1.13** Policies NR7 Cannock Chase SAC and NR8 River Mease SAC are relevant to all aspects of the SPD and relate to the need to address any impacts upon the Special Areas of Conservation.

**1.14** Policy NR7 Cannock Chase SAC advises that before development is permitted it must be demonstrated that alone or in combination new development will not have an adverse effect upon the SAC. The SAC is essentially a heathland site, its environmental importance and reasons for its designation are listed as, 'European dry heaths' and 'Northern Atlantic wet heaths'. Increased visitor numbers has resulted in degradation of these habitats for example through loss of air quality arising from pollution from traffic; disturbance/erosion caused by visitors and recreational users including cyclists and horse riders. Evidence highlights the likely increase in such pressures as a result of population growth in the District, and suggests that most pressure will come from residential development within a 15km radius zone of influence. Lichfield District Council has worked together with other local authorities within the zone of influence of the SAC to develop strategies for mitigating the impacts. It is expected that new development will include some mitigation for the impact on the SAC. This would normally take the form of a financial contribution towards the overall package of mitigation measures being put in place, and this would be secured through a bilateral or unilateral Section 106

Agreement. It is recommended that potential developers contact the Council or check the Council's website for latest guidance.

**1.15** Policy NR8 River Mease SAC advises that development will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it will not be likely to lead to an adverse affect upon the SAC. The River Mease represents one of the best examples of an unspoiled meandering lowland river which supports characteristic habitats and species. The SAC supports populations of spined loach and bullhead which are the primary reason for its designation with additional species, namely water crowfoot, otter and white clawed crayfish present as further qualifying features. It has been identified that damage is being caused by poor water quality, exacerbated by pollution, run-off, siltation, abstraction and invasive non-native species. Development which increases the stress on sewage treatment works or increases the level of phosphate in the watercourse would make matters worse. It is expected therefore that for new developments in the water catchment of the River Mease, the effective avoidance and /or mitigation of potential adverse impacts must be demonstrated as part of any planning application. The catchment area covers part of the Parishes of Edingale, Harlaston and Clifton Campville and it is recommended that further advice be sought from the Council regarding this matter prior to the submission of any planning applications for schemes within this area. The River Mease Supplementary Planning document is available via the Council's website.

**1.16 Lichfield District Local Plan 1998 (saved policies)** - these polices have been 'saved' and will be reviewed as part of the Allocations DPD.

- Policy E2: Forest of Mercia
- Policy B24: Chasewater Country Park

- Policy NA1: Cannock Chase –Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Policy EA14: The Tame and Trent Valley (this area has been renamed as the Central Rivers Initiative)
- Policy EA16: The National Forest

**1.17** These policies recognise the individual characteristics of the areas.

## 2 Rural Housing

**2.1** Nearly 40% of residents live in the rural areas and in addressing these housing needs it is important that only appropriate and sympathetic residential development takes place which helps maintain the vitality of these areas and ensuring that they remain sustainable places to live and work.

**2.2** Housing in the rural areas should be located where it will enhance or maintain the viability of rural communities and the development of new housing should be responsive to local circumstances. Building isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances, such as where there is an essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside or where the development would re-use a redundant or disused building(s) and lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting. Detailed guidance on rural workers dwellings and re-use of rural buildings is within Appendix 1 and 2 of this document.

**2.3** The District Council must try and address the housing needs of those living in the rural areas of the district as well as the urban areas. Evidence to identify the future housing requirements and needs is within the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), the Housing Needs Study (2012) and the Rural Housing Needs Survey (2008). These reports highlighted that in many rural areas property values are generally much higher compared to the district wide average. They also highlighted an imbalance of housing types with high concentrations of larger, detached homes in rural areas and a lack of smaller homes to enable older people to downsize in their own village or enable younger people to get on the property ladder. The Rural Housing Needs Survey identified that size of dwelling was the main reason for residents finding

that their property was unsuitable for their needs; however it also recognised that often many with genuine connections to particular rural areas cannot afford to live there.

### Relevant Local Plan policies

**2.4** The Local Plan Strategy contains policies to assist in balancing the housing market. Local Plan Core Policy 1 seeks growth in the most accessible and sustainable locations. New rural housing will also be directed mainly towards the existing rural settlements of Alrewas, Armitage with Handsacre, Fazeley, Fradley, Shenstone and Whittington. Allocations of sites for new rural housing will be considered through the Local Plan Allocations document or through a community led plan where this is in broad conformity with the Local Plan.

**2.5** Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 6 sets out the criteria for permitting residential development in the remaining rural areas:

- infill development within defined village settlement boundaries (set out in the Local Plan Allocations document);
- affordable housing delivered through rural exceptions (see section 2.17 below);
- changes of use and conversion schemes;
- small scale development supported by local communities, identified through the Local Plan Allocations document or community led plans;
- agricultural, forestry and other rural occupational workers dwellings (Appendix A).

**2.6** Residential development will be expected to:

- contribute to the achievement of sustainable communities;
- incorporate high quality design in line with the Sustainable Design and Residential Design Guide SPD's;
- assist in meeting the identified housing needs, including affordable homes and homes with care, within our sub-housing market areas, including the requirements of housing market areas relating to neighbouring Tamworth and Rugeley; and
- deliver the required, identified physical, green, social and community infrastructure requirements necessary to support sustainable communities.

**2.7** The smaller villages will accommodate housing to meet local needs, mainly within identified village boundaries, unless supported as a rural exception site. Limited infill development will also be allowed in Green Belt villages, with appropriate 'infill' boundaries being determined through local community consultation in preparing the Local Plan Allocations document. Limited affordable housing for local community needs in the Green Belt will be supported on small rural exception sites where the development complies with Local Plan Policy H2: Provision of Affordable Homes.

#### **Evidence of rural housing need**

**2.8** The need for different dwelling types and sizes across the district as a whole was identified by the 2012 SHMA and Housing Needs study. The 2008 Rural Housing Needs survey (RHNS) also provides useful evidence of need in four rural sub areas. The RHNS identified that size of dwelling was the main reason given in relation to residents finding their property unsuitable

as it was too large for their family's need. The greatest demand was for 2 and 3 bed properties particularly for new forming households.

**2.9** The District Council will consider other evidence of local housing need in rural locations. Local housing needs surveys are the best form of evidence and they should follow a robust process with the subsequent analysis being unbiased and carried out by an impartial party.

**2.10** Ideally a survey should be carried out in conjunction with an independent rural housing enabler. A good example of this was the 2013 parish housing needs survey for the parish of Edingale where the Parish and District Council worked together with a rural enabler from Midlands Rural Housing to complete a survey in the village.

**2.11** In some cases a housing needs survey might be initiated by a Parish Council or similar as part of the neighbourhood planning process. It is also anticipated that applicants may choose to carry out a local survey in support of a development proposal, and this should demonstrate consultation with the Parish Council and other appropriate community groups. To ensure consistency, the District Council should agree the methodology and content of any housing needs survey before it is conducted. Further guidance on conducting surveys can be obtained from the Housing Strategy team; the team can be contacted via the Council's main switchboard tel: 01543 308000 or via email [housing@lichfielddc.gov.uk](mailto:housing@lichfielddc.gov.uk)

#### **Affordable housing**

**2.12** *Affordable housing is defined as<sup>(i)</sup>: Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the*

*market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.*

**2.13** Local Plan Strategy Policy H2 sets out the criteria for the provision of affordable homes. Outside the two main urban areas, affordable housing will be required on housing developments in line with nationally set thresholds. In the absence of any nationally set thresholds or more up to date guidance the Council's position with regard to the threshold at which affordable housing will be required is to require affordable housing on housing developments for 5 or more dwellings or sites of 0.2 ha or more in size.<sup>(ii)</sup>

**2.14** Affordable housing may be in the form of social rent, affordable rent, intermediate or a mix of tenures. The District Council will normally require at least 65% to be social rented managed by a registered provider. The District Council currently has 3 housing associations as preferred development partners, Bromford, Midland Heart and Waterloo and reviews these regularly.

**2.15** Any social rented and affordable rented homes will be allocated through a choice based lettings scheme<sup>(iii)</sup> in accordance with the Council's allocation policy<sup>(iv)</sup>. In accordance with this policy, housing associations must allocate 100% of their nominations to households with a connection to Lichfield District, with exceptions allowed in only 10% of cases.

**2.16** The allocations policy allows local lettings plans to be developed where appropriate, and also allows flexibility to impose further restrictions in rural areas if needed through the planning process, for example to define local connection to a certain parish or parishes on a rural exception site. These local lettings plans must be agreed by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health. The allocations policy states that when new housing developments are built within rural areas planning restrictions may state that those applicants wishing to apply must have a direct local connection to that specific rural area (local lettings policies). When advertised through Homes Direct, properties will be clearly labelled with the eligibility criteria.

#### **Rural exception sites**

**2.17** The District Council acknowledges that in certain rural villages there may be sites available for housing where proposals for market housing would be contrary to adopted policy. Such 'rural exception sites' will be expected to be 100% affordable housing<sup>(v)</sup>, and remain affordable in perpetuity (schemes including shared ownership will normally have staircasing limits placed at 80% ownership).

**2.18** Such sites will only be considered acceptable providing that they maintain or enhance the vitality of the local community by addressing a genuine local need for affordable housing within the SHMA sub-area as evidenced through a local housing needs survey. The housing mix and tenure split of affordable housing on rural exception sites will be determined by the particular local need identified in the survey.

ii Cabinet 6th October, 2015

iii This is currently Homes Direct

iv It is currently Lichfield Lettings Scheme and was approved by the District Council in August 2013. It is available to view at [http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/5442/lichfield\\_lettings\\_scheme](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/5442/lichfield_lettings_scheme)

v NPPF

**2.19** There must be no conflict with other Local Plan policies and the following criteria need to be met:

- The majority of the homes provided are affordable;
- The site is adjacent to existing village settlement boundaries;
- A housing need has been identified in the parish, or in one or more of the adjacent parishes, for the type and scale of development proposed;
- The proposed development is considered suitable by virtue of its size and scale in relation to an existing settlement and its services, and its proximity to public transport links and key infrastructure; and
- The initial and subsequent occupancy of affordable homes is controlled through planning conditions and legal agreements, as appropriate, to ensure that the accommodation remains available in perpetuity to local people in affordable housing need.

**2.20** For the purposes of this policy, 'local' will be defined as those who:

- are currently resident in the village or have been resident in the village and have done so for at least 6 months out of the last 12 months or for not less than 3 years out of the last 5 years (or, where no need is identified in the village, in the parish within which the village is located);
- have an employment connection to that village/ parish, or
- who have a family connection to that village/ parish.

**2.21** If there are no households in the local community in housing need at the stage of letting or selling the property, it will be made available to other households in need, looking next at adjoining parishes and then to need in the wider district in accordance with the allocations policy for affordable housing. To ensure that this is achieved, the Council will seek to negotiate appropriate agreements with the Registered Housing Provider implementing the scheme.

### **Residential care homes**

**2.22** The disproportionate percentage of older persons in the rural areas could result in an increasing demand for sheltered housing and residential care homes. Such developments will be encouraged within settlements with good access to doctors' surgeries and other local services including public transport links.

### 3 Services & Facilities

**3.1** *In relation to the District's existing communities and settlements, appropriate proposals which contribute to their improved sustainability, cohesion and community well being will be supported. (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 1)*

**3.2** The rural areas have historically suffered from loss of services and facilities and this concerns residents, however there are recent examples of new facilities being delivered in our rural villages. This section sets out what is essential for the sustainable functioning of our rural settlements and the interpretation of policy in relation to replacement and small scale development for services and facilities.

**3.3** Local shops and the services and facilities they offer are vital to supporting a prosperous rural economy, promoting healthy communities and creating and maintaining sustainable communities. They encourage social interaction, exercise and promote health and well being in our rural communities.

**3.4** Our rural areas have a lower frequency of public transport provision and a high proportion of older people; over half of our older population do not have access to a car which compounds their ability to access services and facilities. Within the rural areas the elderly are especially vulnerable. There is restricted access to health services in rural areas with only branch GP Surgeries in Armitage, Shenstone, Stonnall and Fazeley resulting in these areas and the wider rural areas they serve not having access to the full range of primary care and having to travel to a main GP practice. In addition malnourishment has been identified as an area of risk for the elderly, which can be prevented where locally accessible shops which provide access to good quality food are available. Malnourishment can result in increased use

of primary care facilities, poorer recovery from illness and increased admissions to hospital.

**3.5** Local Plan Strategy policy and the NPPF seek to promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages. Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 4: Delivering our Infrastructure, states that development proposals which result in the loss of a key facility from a settlement, which is essential to the sustainable functioning of that settlement will not be supported, unless a replacement facility of improved quality, accessibility and size is provided for that community in a sustainable location. The important role the villages play in supporting other outlying villages is recognised in the Vision for Rural Areas and Local Plan Strategy Policy Rural 1: Rural Areas. The definition of the key services and facilities are those which are essential to the sustainable functioning of a settlement and are listed below.

#### Definition of services and facilities

**3.6** Services and facilities include a wide range of social, recreational and cultural uses which enhance the sustainability of communities and will be considered as those which provide a key function in the operation of the existing community.

**3.7** The following list is not exclusive and there may be other facilities/services which represent local services which enhance the sustainability of communities and could be identified through a Neighbourhood Plan. They are key services and facilities which enable a community to meet its day-to-day needs and reduce the need for car borne travel. They enable money to be accessed, food to be bought, social interaction and health and well being to be promoted. They could include:

- shops e.g. post office, general store;

## 3 Services & Facilities

- health services e.g. doctor's surgery, dentist, pharmacy,
- primary school;
- community hall, meeting place, e.g. facility to enable youth provision, for clubs to meet, events to be held and the provision of outreach services such as health etc;
- pub, informal social gathering space;
- places of worship;
- sports venue.

**3.8** The loss or reduction in the key services and facilities should not restrict the sustainable functioning of that settlement or the wider rural hinterland including the smaller outlying villages and hamlets which also rely on them so as to result in disadvantage to the population and be detrimental to the health and well being of the population. Innovative ways of delivering altered services and facilities will be considered acceptable where these are justified and have no detrimental impact on the functioning of the settlement e.g. the relocation of the post office to within the adjacent general store, where the opening times (accessibility) is retained.

**3.9** It is important that services which provide for the daily needs of residents will be safeguarded as a minimum and innovative ways of delivering these without over reliance on the internet will be encouraged. Whilst the internet has increased the accessibility to goods and services, it is not accessible to all members of the community. Access to the internet varies considerably with age. For households with one adult aged 65 or over, only 41% of households had internet

connection and 32% of those indicated it was due to a lack of skills, with 12% citing equipment and access costs as being too high<sup>(vi)</sup>. Nationally 64% of people in social housing are not online<sup>(vii)</sup>. Digital exclusion is a particular risk in the rural areas, especially for older people.

**3.10** Changes of use which result in the loss or reduction of a service or facility will need to be justified and guidance on the evidence required to justify planning proposals is within the guidance section at para 3.17.

### Replacement facilities and small scale development

**3.11** Replacement facilities and small scale development to meet local needs can deliver enhanced facilities and services and enrich the quality of life of residents within the settlements and hinterland.

**3.12** They will need to be compatible with the character and needs of the local community and be:

- in a sustainable location;
- Integrated;
- accessible;
- clearly and robustly evidenced (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 4 and Rural 2), including consultation;
- comply with Green Belt policy where necessary.

Further guidance on the evidence required is within the guidance section at para 3.17.

vi Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, ONS 2014

vii Ipsos Mori November 2012

**3.13** Proposals for replacement facilities it is expected will also be supported by consultation with the Parish Council and the communities affected, including those in the rural hinterland served by the facility/service. The results of the consultation will be vital in assessing the 'needs of the local community' (Local Plan Strategy Policy Rural 2) and also, where possible, addressing existing deficiencies. e.g where a community building is being replaced; is there any existing deficiency in open space or equipped play which could be incorporated into the project/design to meet the needs of the local community, another example may be a deficiency in car parking for the doctor's surgery.

**3.14** Consideration of the re-use of disused rural buildings may also enable an enhancement of the immediate surroundings.

**3.15** When considering replacement facilities Core Policy 4 of the Local Plan Strategy states that these will be supported if they are 'of improved quality, accessibility and size' than that which is being replaced, however this is not to be interpreted as support for increasing the size beyond the scale and nature of the rural community the previous facility/service provided for. The replacement facility should be provided for 'that' community and the hinterland that it serves, and should protect the character of the area, its community and respect the settlement hierarchy of Lichfield District. A larger facility may be justifiable where this is in response to planned growth in an adopted development plan.

#### **Guidance on how to assess replacement facilities and small scale development**

**3.16** To enable rural communities to become as sustainable as possible an assessment will need to be undertaken which considers the impact of changes or loss to services and facilities. The

'sustainable functioning' referred to in Local Plan Core Policy 4, will be assessed on the accessibility currently provided by the service or facility through the range of services it provides, the needs it meets and how the proposal will impact upon these. It seeks to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities which would reduce the community's ability to meet its day to day needs.

**3.17** Where planning permission would be required assessment should include:

- the frequency the service/ facility is used, this could be daily needs e.g. provision of milk, bread, or weekly needs: aerobics, gardening club etc;
- the distance travelled to use the service/facility and ease in accessing it - safe walking routes, is the route flat, bicycle accessibility, bus stop proximity and frequency of service, drive times etc;
- the users of the service/facility and thus who will be impacted by the change and how this relates to the local profile of the settlement and rural area e.g. elderly/children/working population;
- if the proposal will address existing deficiencies, perhaps in open space, car parking or improve safety.
- any impact the proposal will have on the ability of the settlement to adapt in the future;
- an assessment of the viability of the service/facility this will include the submission of accounts, etc;
- a marketing report including evidence of marketing of an appropriate quality and realistic price over a sustained period of time. The length of time considered appropriate for marketing

will depend upon each case and discussions with the Parish Council and District Council Development Management officers should be undertaken.

**3.18** Possible sources of data for the assessment could include: Census, Rural Settlement Sustainability Study, Local Plan, and neighbourhood plans.

**3.19** For community buildings / facilities the long term management and ownership will be considered where replacement is being sought.

**3.20** The delivery of replacement facilities e.g. the construction phase of the replacement will also be a factor in the consideration of proposals, so infrastructure is delivered at a timely stage, (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 4), especially as in the rural areas it is likely to be the only facility serving the area.

#### **Community assets**

**3.21** Some services and facilities may be included on a register of assets of community value, this permits voluntary and community organisations to prepare a bid to buy the asset and is to give community groups an increased opportunity to save local facilities by developing a proposal and raising the capital required. More information is available on [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/communityrights) and [www.mycommunityrights.org.uk](http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk)

## 4 Rural Economy & Tourism

**4.1** *Lichfield District's large rural hinterland has a diverse economic profile, ranging from agriculture to the service sector and tourism, including heritage tourism. Agriculture delivers real growth to the rural areas and it is important for the District Council to recognise the current economic drivers affecting the rural areas including farm diversification, conversion of rural buildings and home working.*

**4.2** A fundamental objective of the Local Plan is to promote economic prosperity. The Local Plan seeks to achieve this by concentrating the majority of employment growth within the strategic centres of Lichfield city, Burntwood and Fradley, (as per Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 1 - The Spatial Strategy). Nevertheless, the District Council will also support the economic vitality and viability of its key rural settlements and other rural areas by enabling the local economy to adapt and supporting new enterprise and the diversification of existing business, where appropriate. Employment and growth in traditional rural industries is low, although they form an important part of the rural economy (Local Plan Strategy: Strategic Priorities 7 and 8).

**4.3** Within the rural area unemployment is generally low, however access to employment can be especially difficult due to limited employment opportunities and public transport availability. Many residents travel from the rural areas to their place of work which results in a reduced sustainability of the settlement and results in high costs; this is especially detrimental for those trying to access the job market and those seeking part time work.

**4.4** Rural employment is often thought of as relating to agriculture and forestry uses, however, within Lichfield District there are a number of large scale employers within

our rural areas such as the Defence Medical Services (DMS), Drayton Manor Park, St Giles Hospice and Little Aston Hospital. Whilst no site specific policy guidance exists for such sites at present, as with all our employment sites their continued redevelopment and modernisation will be encouraged in order to meet current and future business needs, where there is no conflict with other local plan policies. Depending upon the size of the settlement there are employers which provide a significant proportion of local employment within their communities and include both international and local companies examples of these range from Ideal Standard at Armitage and a nursing home in Mavesyn Ridware.

**4.5** Fradley, Fazeley and Shenstone are rural villages with significant employment sites. Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 7 states that land will be allocated for employment uses, informed by the employment portfolio as shown within the Employment Land Review but the policy does not differentiate between existing employment sites within Lichfield, Burntwood or the rural areas. This matter will be considered through the Local Plan Allocation DPD. Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 7 seeks the continuing improvement of existing employment sites and seeks to encourage them to become more energy efficient, to link effectively with local communities, provide supporting infrastructure including ancillary facilities for employees. This could include provision of adequate outdoor space, a café, provision for cyclists or an improved link to public transport where these do not exist nearby and result in better, higher quality and more modern employment facilities that are best able to meet the current and future business needs and continue to support the sustainability of these settlements and their rural hinterland. There is often scope within these sites for managed workspaces and

small incubator units which particularly support start up businesses for which there is a need reflected by the District's above average levels in the self employed sector.

**4.6** The Council will support, in principle, the sustainable growth of business and enterprise where this accords with policies in the Local Plan. Access to employment is often more difficult in the rural areas and opportunities and experience in the working environment such as the local shop or volunteering to support local services can be a useful first step. In rural areas sustainable growth both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings where this does not conflict with other plan policies can be achieved (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 7). Green Belt is a significant policy consideration as over half of the district falls within Green Belt where there are policy restrictions with regard to development, these are detailed in Local Plan Strategy Policy NR2 and national guidance. In Green Belt the re-use of buildings that are of permanent and substantial construction can enable investment to proceed.

**4.7** Rural buildings can be used for a wide variety of uses and the general principles of design are at Appendix B.

**4.8** Specific guidance is also applicable to offices, and this is considered below.

#### **Rural Offices**

**4.9** Whilst office based employment is generally directed towards the most sustainable centres of Lichfield City, Burntwood and existing employment areas, smaller scale rural offices can improve the economic sustainability of rural areas by providing opportunities for high value employment and should be directed to existing settlements. They can enable people to work closer to where they live and therefore reduce the need to travel and

support local services and facilities. Small scale offices can support start up business, provide managed work spaces, bring rural buildings back into use and provide an enhancement of the surroundings. Advice on the detail design principles for the re-use of rural buildings are within Appendix B.

**4.10** The conversion of existing rural buildings for office use and small scale new build schemes currently do not require justification through a sequential test under the NPPF. Larger schemes may require a sequential test and impact assessments. Any new development would also need to be in keeping with the scale and character of the existing settlement and consideration of the suitability of the local roads for accommodating the associated vehicular movements will need to be considered.

**4.11** Details on how to undertake an impact assessment and sequential test are detailed within the National Planning Practice Guidance section on ['Ensuring the vitality of town centres'](#)

**4.12** In addition new 'permitted development rights' have been introduced with regard to changes of use of some 'agricultural buildings' to office use. There are various criteria which need to be addressed and can involve the need for 'prior approval' procedures to be followed. It is advisable to discuss any scheme seeking to utilise this approach with the District Council's officers.

#### **Rural Diversification**

**4.13** The rural areas in Lichfield District no longer rely on agriculture as a major employer, however it remains a highly important component of the rural economy. Some farms are diversifying into alternatives such as organic farming, energy generation and farm shops. Many farmers today have to find alternatives sources of income in order to survive financially.

**4.14** In keeping with the [Staffordshire Rural Declaration](#), the District Council will promote a prosperous farming and food sector that plays a key role in the conservation and enhancement of rural areas. Whilst Local Plan Policy NR1 states the countryside is a valued asset in its own right and will be protected, it also recognises the important economic role of the countryside and the wealth of resources it provides and seeks to assist in the delivery of diverse and sustainable farming enterprises. Small scale development related to alternative sources of energy creation will be encouraged provided it does not have a detrimental impact on neighbouring amenity, landscape and other Local Plan Strategy policies such as Core Policy 3, and Policies SC1 and SC2).

**4.15** The District Council also recognises that there are a number of buildings within the countryside which form part of the rural landscape and play an important part in creating the character of the local environment. Where these are of permanent and substantial construction, the adaption and re-use of these existing buildings can help meet the needs of rural areas. Specific evidence identifying the historic farmsteads and their characteristics is available by following this [link](#). Some redundant rural building complexes can be developed in their own right. Mixed use conversions can provide start up space for new business, storage etc. Within the district, the Heart of the Country at Swinfen and the Curborough Craft centre are examples of this. Examples outside of the district include the successful employment-led Dunston Business Village near Stafford. Other opportunities could include a farm or plant nursery with shop to sell the plants and produce grown on site with café facilities. Often the manufacture and subsequent sale of craft items may also be combined with public displays or courses to attract new customers. Details on the design of schemes for the re-use of rural

buildings is contained within **Appendix B**. Some buildings which can be classed as 'agricultural buildings' have permitted development rights which permits certain changes of use and the latest advice should be sought from the Council's Development Management officers when considering this approach.

**4.16** It is also important to note that proposals which incorporate uses also appropriate in a town centre such as retail and offices will need to be in accordance with town centre first policies as defined by NPPF. In the case of retail proposals, depending on location and scale, impact assessments may also be required under Policy E1 of the Local Plan Strategy. Policy E1 sets a threshold that in the rural areas and other centres outside Lichfield and Burntwood, a retail assessment will be required for new retail developments involving over 100sqm gross of floorspace. The assessment should enable an appraisal to be made as to the impact arising from the proposed development both individually and cumulatively on centres within and beyond the catchment of the potential development, and could include centres outside Lichfield District. For further advice as to the necessary content within a sequential test and impact assessment refer to the NPPG notes relating to 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' and early contact with the Council's Development Management officers is advised.

**4.17** The sequential test and the impact assessments seek to maintain the vitality of our town centres and hierarchy of centres and as part of any required assessments information as to the type of goods sold and services available will be required. Thought should therefore be given to the impact upon viability of the proposed development both now and in the future and discussions held with the Council's Development Management officers as to whether such restrictions would be appropriate.

**4.18** For local advice on economic development issues visit the Business and Economic Partnership website which can be accessed via [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk) or call 01543 308000 and ask to speak a member of the Economic Development team.

### Tourism

**4.19** According to Visit Britain one in twelve jobs in the UK is currently either directly or indirectly supported by tourism and the most recent Tourism Background Paper estimated the visitor economy to be worth approximately £5million per month to the district's economy. Central to the Defra Rural Statement is the priority of attracting more people to rural areas and encouraging them to stay longer when they visit.

**4.20** Within the rural areas income from tourism and recreational activities is recognised as an important part of our rural economy. A number of key tourist attractions serving the West Midlands are located within Lichfield District and it is important these are maintained and enhanced where appropriate. Sustainable tourist development is about making a low impact on the environment and local culture, whilst helping to generate income and employment for local people. In the rural area this needs to be balanced with the need to protect the countryside as an asset in its own right.

**4.21** Within the rural areas of Lichfield District there are existing large scale initiatives whose use is primarily for recreation and leisure but are of a scale which is also recognised as being part of our tourism offer and thus part of our rural economy. Mentioned specifically in Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 9: Tourism, are the National Memorial Arboretum, Chasewater Country Park, Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Forest, Forest of Mercia, and the Central Rivers Initiative (Whitemoor Lakes).

These initiatives all involve large areas of land and are all generally open uses within the countryside, however they also now have visitor facilities, albeit not all in Lichfield District, and attract significant numbers of people to the rural area. They support the tourism and cultural sector of our economy both directly and indirectly and they are of a scale and nature appropriate to the context of their surroundings. Often separate plans are formulated for large scale initiatives which have been considered in the preparation of the Local Plan Strategy. Site specific policies exist as saved policies from the Lichfield District Local Plan 1998 which will be reviewed as part of the Local Plan Allocations document for Chasewater Country Park (Policy B.24), Forest of Mercia (Policy E.2), Central Rivers Initiative (Policy EA.14 Tame and Trent Valley), National Forest (EA.16), Cannock Chase AONB (Policy NA.1) and parts of the canal network where these lie within the Green Belt. Proposals will also be subject to national and Local Plan Strategy Policy NR2 on development within the Green Belt.

**4.22** To support our tourist economy a variety of types of additional overnight accommodation are encouraged generally within the District, (Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 9). New hotel development should be directed to existing town centres and as a town centre use would be subject to a sequential test and impact assessment. The details for the content of a sequential test and impact assessment are specified in the NPPF and NPPG notes.

**4.23** Holiday accommodation in rural areas can help drive up the overnight tourist spend and supports local businesses such as pubs, restaurants and shops. In order to increase the number of overnight visitors, conversion of rural buildings to holiday lets or use of underused upper floors in areas with access to local services will be supported where appropriate and in accordance with Local Plan Strategy policy.

Further evidence may be required in relation to the potential impacts of such developments on the affordability of local housing and accessibility to public transport. Further advice and guidance on the conversion of rural buildings is set out in Appendix B of this document.

**4.24** Other forms of seasonal overnight accommodation such as caravan sites and camp sites will be assessed on their own merits, and regard will be had to the scale and nature of the proposals. Stricter controls apply within areas designated as Green Belt and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Supporting information on the following will be useful in assessing applications:

- Accessibility – to the site and impact on the surrounding highway network;
- Accessibility to services and facilities;
- Visual impact upon the openness of the landscape and sensitivity of the landscape e.g AONB, hill top locations and other prominent locations will have a greater visual impact and be more difficult to assimilate into the landscape. The impact of lighting should also be considered;
- Permanent or seasonal use;
- Amenity and potential for noise, disturbance and other impacts upon residents;
- Impact upon biodiversity, especially the Cannock Chase SAC (Local Plan Strategy Policy NR7) and River Mease SAC (Local Plan Strategy Policy NR8);
- Disposal of foul drainage.

## 5 Recreation & Leisure Development

**5.1** Within the rural areas of Lichfield District there are many types of recreation and leisure uses. There are uses as diverse as golf courses, marinas, flying clubs, children's farms, sensory gardens, sports pitches and sports clubs.

**5.2** Recreation and leisure uses in the rural area can support the local economy providing jobs and services as well as offering a range of recreation and leisure opportunities. These can serve a much wider catchment than the District itself, providing the green space and recreation opportunity for those living in the conurbation and nearby towns which can both bolster the local economy and support healthy lifestyles but can also put pressure on the local environment so it is important to maintain a balance.

**5.3** National policy guidance and local policy directs leisure and cultural development to town centres, in Lichfield District this is Lichfield City and Burntwood. However some recreation and leisure uses are preferred and often found in a rural context. One of the NPPF's 12 Core Planning Principles states that planning should take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it. The NPPF supports leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside.

**5.4** It is important to note that parts of the District lie within the Green Belt where greater restrictions apply, especially with regard to new buildings and these are

considered in para 5.17 below. The NPPF states that local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; and to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation where these are consistent with the fundamental aim of Green Belt, its essential characteristics and the 5 purposes of Green Belt identified in the NPPF

**5.5** Within the Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 9 supports sustainable tourism to help support the local economy and explains at para 9.26 that sustainable tourist development is about making a low impact upon the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income and employment for local people. Within the rural areas sustainable tourism opportunities should be of a scale and nature appropriate to the locality, linked to existing villages to support local services and facilities, whilst utilising existing transport opportunities.

**5.6** Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 10: Healthy and Safe Lifestyles seeks to help people live healthier lifestyles through the availability of a variety of good quality and accessible community infrastructure such as open spaces, walkways and cycle ways, playing pitches, sport, recreation and play facilities. The policy encourages the co-location of different types of open space and facilities for sport and recreation and supports initiatives which support participation and volunteering where appropriate.

**5.7** Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 10: Healthy and Safe Lifestyles also seeks integration of new developments which will be expected to include multi-functional green spaces in accordance with Policy NR6 which connect the development to the wider rights of way network and areas of accessible countryside.

**5.8** Local Plan Strategy Policy NR1 recognises the important economic role of the countryside and the wealth of resources it provides, but also that it should be valued and be protected as an asset in its own right. A careful balance therefore needs to be achieved when considering new development in the rural areas. The policy advises that new building in the countryside away from existing settlements, or outside those areas designated for development will be strictly controlled. Over half of Lichfield District lies within the Green Belt where further restrictions on appropriate uses and new buildings apply, these are detailed in the NPPF paragraphs 88 and 89 and Local Plan policy NR2. However the countryside provides a wealth of opportunities for leisure and recreational activities as well as supporting traditional agricultural practises and farm diversification. This SPD provides clarity and guidance on these policies.

**5.9** Uses such as golf courses, equestrian activities, sailing, camp sites, marinas and noisy sports such as motocross are examples of open recreational uses which are often found in rural areas. Often uses can operate using no buildings or existing buildings within the site. These uses can support and facilitate positive countryside management and strengthen the rural economy. Other forms of recreation and leisure development can support existing rural sustainability (vitality) by providing local jobs and by supporting existing services and facilities and can positively add to the delivery of other policies in the Local Plan for example a new sports pitch on the edge of a key rural settlement can encourage visits to the existing local shop and the landscaping around the pitch can contribute a net gain to biodiversity in the area as well as meeting a deficiency for pitches in the area.

**5.10** Changes of use which do not initially involve new build are advised to consider the need for buildings in the future, especially given the restrictions on new build in the Green Belt.

**5.11** The change of use of existing buildings to recreation and leisure uses or which provide ancillary facilities such as changing rooms is considered preferable to building new facilities, as this minimises the proliferation of new buildings and the built form in open countryside thus protecting the countryside from inappropriate development. The sharing of facilities or locating different types of facilities next to each such as changing rooms/car parks can also reduce their impact and can help support the long term economic viability of the uses as the sharing of facilities enables the sharing of maintenance costs. In addition the conversion of existing buildings for changing rooms can bring derelict structures back into use, enhancing the landscape and reducing opportunities for anti social behaviour.

**5.12** Further advice is given on the reuse of rural buildings in Appendix B. Change of use of existing agricultural buildings is considered separately later in this section.

**5.13** Where a planning application is required for a change of use, this may be assessed on its impact directly or indirectly, and while each individual proposal will be assessed on its own merits, the following issues (depending on each scheme and the scale of the proposal) may need to be taken into consideration and may therefore need additional information to be prepared to assist the decision making process:

#### **Environmental factors**

- environmental factors – e.g. Flooding;

## 5 Recreation & Leisure Development

- minimise visual impact in order to protect the countryside's intrinsic character and beauty; including the impacts of lighting and mitigation measures such as landscaping;
- the diversity of its landscapes and heritage, including appropriate design principles which are sensitive to the historic environment (which could be informed by the Historic Environment Character Assessment, Register of Historic Assets and the Historic Environment SPD);
- wildlife and impact upon trees, woodland, hedgerows, green corridors and biodiversity. (Development is required to deliver a net gain for biodiversity and/or geodiversity in the District (Local Plan Strategy Policy NR3). More information is in the Biodiversity and Development SPD);
- the wealth of natural resources which exist in the countryside including such diverse criteria as tranquillity and mineral deposits.

### Economic factors

- economic impact, impact upon sustainability, job creation, impact upon town centres and key rural settlements/ability for use to be located within the more sustainable settlements. A separate sequential test and impact assessment may be necessary as set out in the NPPF. For changes of use or new development which includes new retail floorspace, Local Plan Strategy Policy E1 is also relevant which requires retail proposals of over 100sq to submit a retail assessment and for recreational proposals. The NPPF para 26 should be referred to which requires a leisure assessment for proposals of 2,500sqm or more).

### Social factors

- meeting a deficiency within an identified development plan;
- highway impact and impact of traffic both on site and within the area as parts of the rural area have low levels of traffic and narrow roads;
- accessibility as much of the rural area has poor access to public transport;
- amenity and potential for noise, disturbance and other impact upon residential property.

**5.14** Parts of the District lie within the Green Belt where greater restrictions apply, especially with regard to new buildings and these are considered in para 5.17 below. The NPPF states that local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access and to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation where these are consistent with the fundamental aim of Green Belt, its essential characteristics and the 5 purposes of Green Belt identified in the NPPF.

### Additional considerations when submitting applications including new buildings and extensions to buildings associated with recreation and leisure uses

**5.15** In addition to the list at para 5.13 above, planning applications which include new build and extensions to buildings associated with recreation and leisure uses will be assessed on their own merits. These may also have to consider any indirect impacts, and if there are any cumulative impacts arising from the new build. Local Plan Strategy Policy NR1 recognises the countryside as an asset in its own right, and

one which should be protected from inappropriate development. Therefore new building development in the countryside away from existing settlements, or outside those areas designated for development within an adopted development plan will be strictly controlled and considered on its own merits in order to protect the countryside's intrinsic character and beauty. Any permitted new buildings should normally be of the minimum size necessary and ancillary to the change of use proposed to limit the impact on the openness of the rural area. All new buildings will have to be sensitively designed and screened with appropriate landscaping in order to mitigate the impact of new buildings on open countryside.

**5.16** Where the new build proposed is also within the Green Belt it is likely additional justification to support the proposal will be required. Local Plan Strategy Policy NR2 refers to the NPPF in its explanation. The NPPF regards the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt and by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. There are exceptions which are not considered as inappropriate development and these are listed within the NPPF. This list currently includes 'provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.' Information should be submitted with any planning application to enable assessment of the very special circumstances as this will assist the decision making process.

**Uses where further information may be needed.**

**5.17** Some uses which may be appropriate in rural areas would benefit from further information than that listed in paragraph 5.13 being submitted with any

planning application in order to enable a fair assessment to be made. The following list of uses are those where further information is likely to be needed **in relation to particular kinds of proposals** and examples of what the further information may be in order to assess an application, although these will be assessed on a case by case basis. The District Council offers a pre-application advice service whereby applicants can seek informal advice from the Council officers; see the [Council's website](#) for more information.

#### **5.18 Applications involving noisy sports**

- Activities such as motocross, aerodromes, sprint track, clay pigeon shooting will need noise assessments.

#### **5.19 Golf courses**

- Agricultural land quality.

#### **5.20 Equestrian**

- Animal welfare as there is a need to provide water and shelter for the animals. Evidence of grouping of buildings to reduce the visual impact. Need for a ménage.

#### **5.21 Allotments**

- Local Plan Strategy Policy HSC1: Open Space Standards, sets standards for allotments and requires them to be well maintained, well managed and designed. Evidence which supports this and consideration of the need for security of the site and tools, the number and type of buildings which will be erected, a water supply, and removal of temporary structures upon cessation of the use.

**5.22 Marinas**

- Evidence of early discussions with regard to water supply and impact upon the water network with Environment Agency and potentially Canal and Rivers Trust.

**Agricultural diversification**

**5.23** To support the rural economy, and our existing uses, especially the farming community, diversification and combinations of uses are often compatible. Local Strategy Plan Policy NR1 supports development proposals not only agricultural but also forestry, horticulture, fishing and equestrian activities and other country based enterprises which promote the recreation and enjoyment of the countryside. Some activities can fit in well with farming activities and help diversify rural economies. The above advice on the conversion of existing buildings and new buildings does however still apply, although some agricultural buildings have new permitted development rights and further guidance on this and on sensitive conversion of buildings is within Appendix B.

## Appendix A Rural Workers Dwellings Guidance

### A.1 Introduction

**1.1** Rural protection policies generally seek to minimise the impact of all development in the countryside, and also the impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt. However, these need to be balanced against both national and local policies seeking to promote and sustain rural economic growth.

**1.2** To assist applicants in making planning applications for rural workers dwellings in the countryside the following guidance detail the national and local policy position and also what will be required to be submitted to enable the application process to progress smoothly.

### A.2 Current Government guidance

**2.1** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart of the NPPF is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development** and supporting a prosperous rural economy will assist in achieving this.

**2.2** Under planning law applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF constitutes a material consideration in determining planning applications.

**2.3** The NPPF establishes 12 core planning principles which should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. These include references to the countryside as follows:

- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;
- contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework;
- encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value.

**2.4** Thus whilst the NPPF recognises the importance of the countryside, it also takes a positive approach to sustainable new development as a means to supporting economic growth in rural areas.

**2.5** The NPPF replaces Planning Policy Statement 7 "Sustainable Development in Rural Areas" which included detailed national guidance for Agriculture, Forestry and Other Occupational Dwellings at Annex A. The NPPF (paragraph 55) advises that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as *'the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside'*. Although PPS7 can no longer be cited as an authority under which to determine planning applications, the tests which were in Annex A are still considered by Inspectors to remain an appropriate way to assess 'essential need' as it is well established and well understood, even though it no longer forms part of Government policy.

**2.6** However, what constitutes 'essential need' or a 'rural worker' is not defined by the NPPF and it is for local authorities to determine what this means locally.

### **A.3 Local planning policies**

**3.1** The Spatial Strategy for the District is set out in the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy. The approach to housing development is outlined in Local Plan Strategy Core Policy 1: The Spatial Strategy, which makes it clear that new housing will be located at the most accessible and sustainable locations in accordance with the settlement hierarchy. In the rural areas new housing is directed mainly towards six identified key rural settlements – Alrewas, Armitage with Handsacre, Fazeley, Fradley, Shenstone and Whittington. Smaller villages are to accommodate housing to meet local needs, mainly within identified village boundaries, unless supported as a rural exception site. Allocations of sites for new rural housing will be considered through the Local Plan Allocations document or through a community led plan.

**3.2** The District Council seeks to support certain economic development proposals in the countryside, as set out in Local Plan Strategy Policy NR1: Countryside Management. The explanation to Policy NR1 states that new building development in the countryside away from existing settlements, or outside those areas designated for development within the Local Plan Strategy, will be strictly controlled. This approach is consistent with paragraph 55 of the NPPF, which advises that local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances, such as the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.

### **A.4 Defining essential needs**

**4.1** There will be some cases where the nature and demands of the work concerned make it essential for one or more people engaged in the enterprise to live at, or very close to, the site of their work. Whether this is essential in any particular case will depend on the needs of the enterprise concerned and not on the personal preferences or circumstances of any of the individuals involved. This was previously called the functional test in PPS7. By way of example, essential need often arises where the welfare of agricultural livestock will benefit from a 24 hour presence.

**4.2** A **functional test** is necessary to establish whether it is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available at most times. An example was given where such a requirement might arise if workers were needed to be on hand day and night, in case animals or agricultural processes required essential care at short notice, or to deal quickly with emergencies that may otherwise cause serious loss of crops or products, such as frost damage or failure of automatic systems.

**4.3** The District Council will apply this functional test in determining planning applications for new rural workers dwellings.

### **A.5 Financial test**

**5.1** New permanent accommodation will not be justified on rural business grounds unless the rural enterprise is economically viable. To establish this a financial test will be applied. This should demonstrate that:

- a) the unit and the rural activity concerned have been established for a reasonable period of time (at least three years);

b) the unit and the rural activity have been profitable for at least one of the three years;

c) the unit and the rural activity are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so.

## A.6 Defining a rural worker

**6.1** The literal translation of 'rural' is 'of the countryside'. Traditionally workers in agriculture and forestry have made up the majority of rural workers, but diversification of the rural economy over recent years has led to many other commercial ventures being established in rural areas. In Lichfield District these have mainly included equestrian and horticultural businesses, as well as a few more unusual ventures, such as a bird of prey breeding enterprise. In most cases an element of animal welfare or crop management that required round-the-clock supervision at certain times of the year has been an intrinsic element of the functional need.

**6.2** However, it is important to note that simply being employed in the countryside is not sufficient to qualify as a rural worker with an essential housing need. This is where the functional test would need to be applied. Many people work in rural areas in locations such as offices, schools, workshops, garages and garden centres but it is unlikely that they will have an essential need to live permanently at or near their place of work.

**6.3** In general, personal factors such as health, legal or financial issues will not be decisive matters in the consideration of applications for rural workers dwellings.

**6.4** Traditionally it was desirable for agricultural workers to be in close proximity to their livestock so they could be on hand to attend to their needs as and when required. Circumstances which require a person to be on site or close by to attend to

the needs of the enterprise outside of normal working hours could include dairy and poultry where the needs of the animals are constant in order to ensure productivity.

**6.5** Requirements for dwellings to provide natural surveillance/security justification for a rural enterprise will not normally be considered sufficient justification for a dwelling because these type of issues could be overcome through surveillance from other adjacent properties (where applicable) and improving the on-site security of machinery and buildings which are part of the enterprise.

## A.7 Permanent rural dwellings

**7.1** New permanent dwellings are only likely to be permitted to support existing businesses and therefore the Council will require the following to be demonstrated in support of any application:

- a clearly established existing **functional need** (see above);
- the need relates to a **full-time worker**, or one who is primarily employed in the business to which the application relates and does not relate to a part-time requirement;
- the unit and the activity concerned have been established for a least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so;
- the functional need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned;

- other development management (planning) criteria, e.g. in relation to access, design or impact on the countryside and ecology are satisfied.

**7.2** Rural dwellings should be of a size commensurate with the established functional requirement. It is the requirements of the enterprise, rather than those of the owner or occupier, that are relevant in determining the size of dwelling that is appropriate to a particular holding or enterprise.

### **A.8 Temporary rural dwellings**

**8.1** If a new dwelling is essential to support a new activity, whether on a newly-created unit or an established one, it should normally, for the first three years, be provided by a caravan/mobile home or other temporary accommodation. The applicant should include the following information to support the application:

- clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise concerned (significant investment in new buildings is often a good indication of intentions);
- functional need (see above);
- clear evidence that the proposed enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis;
- the functional need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the local area;
- other normal development management (planning) requirements are satisfied e.g. on siting and access.

**8.2** If permission for temporary accommodation is granted, permission for a permanent dwelling is unlikely to be granted within three years.

### **A.9 Planning conditions**

**9.1** In most cases where a permanent rural worker's dwelling is granted planning permission this shall be restricted through the imposition of an occupancy condition, with suggested wording as follows:

**9.2** *'The occupation of the dwelling shall be limited to a person solely or mainly working, or last working, in the locality in agriculture, forestry or a specified rural occupation, or a widow or widower of such a person, and any resident dependants.'*

**9.3** This reflects the standard condition set out in Circular 11/95 'The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions' and will ensure that the dwelling is kept available to meet the needs of rural workers in the locality if it is no longer needed by the original business, and will avoid a proliferation of dwellings in the open countryside.

**9.4** Justification for the removal of such a condition would need to demonstrate that there is no existing or foreseeable future demand for that dwelling with the condition attached. Such justification needs to include detailed and conclusive evidence of:

- a lack of demand for the property through a robust marketing exercise sustained for at least twelve months; and
- the lack of an identified need for new agricultural dwellings in the local area.

**9.5** Consideration will be given in any application for the discharge of occupancy conditions to the long term need for rural dwellings both at the particular farm/land

holding in question and in the locality, bearing in mind any changes in the scale and character of the enterprise in response to market trends.

Management team on 01543  
308000/308174 or email  
[devcontrol@lichfielddc.gov.uk](mailto:devcontrol@lichfielddc.gov.uk)

**9.6** Other conditions which may be imposed include requiring the period for implementation of a planning permission within one year, to ensure that an agricultural enterprise begins in that time and minimises the effects of changes in market conditions. In addition the District Council may require the prior completion of buildings used as justification for a rural dwellings (e.g. intensive animal breeding units) and the removal of permitted development rights in sensitive locations.

**9.7** In the case of planning permission for a temporary caravan/mobile home, a planning condition ensuring personal consent may be appropriate, since the permission is for a limited period of time (usually three years) and may relate to a specialised enterprise by a particular individual.

## **A.10 Additional information**

**10.1** Within the rural parts of the District there are many agricultural enterprises which employ a large number of seasonal employees especially during the summer months. As many of these roles are temporary they will not qualify for a permanent dwelling in the countryside. Should accommodation be required to satisfy the operational needs of these roles it should be provided in the existing housing stock across the District.

**10.2** In assessing the functional and financial needs of the proposals the District Council may seek external advice from specialist consultants.

**10.3** If you require further information prior to submitting your application please contact the Lichfield District Council Development

## Appendix B Re-use of Rural Buildings

### B.1 Introduction

**1.1** The adaptation and re-use of existing rural buildings can help meet the needs of rural areas, especially to support economic development, tourism, residential and recreational uses. Such buildings can include agricultural buildings, as well as buildings which have been in other uses, such as industrial uses. Many of the buildings are of intrinsic architectural or historic interest whilst others are more modern and utilitarian in appearance, but nevertheless of permanent and substantial construction. Making use of existing buildings may reduce demand for new building in the countryside, provide income for agricultural enterprises and encourage the re-use of scarce resources.

**1.2** Rural buildings are a significant part of the landscape of the District and play an important role in creating the character of the local environment. Rural buildings commonly contain bat roosts and other species and the places they reside which are protected by legislation. Not all rural buildings are suitable for conversion. Some buildings would require major or complete reconstruction, alteration or extension to allow their re-use. Such works would effectively represent the creation of a new building in the countryside which would in most circumstances, be contrary to rural area planning policies.

**1.3** The purpose of this guidance is to provide applicants, agents, landowners and potential purchasers of rural buildings with advice regarding the suitability or otherwise of buildings for conversion and design guidance to ensure that conversion schemes are carried out in a way which is appropriate in terms of the character and function of the building and its context.

### B.2 Policy context and general purpose

**2.1** Current local and national planning policies contained in the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) set out a general presumption in favour of sustainable development. The NPPF regards sustainable development as having three dimensions: economic, social and environmental. Local and national policies recognise the conversion and re-use of rural buildings having a role in terms of enabling sustainable economic growth in rural areas and contributing to the supply of rural housing, particularly where located in sustainable locations and where it would secure the future of heritage assets.

**2.2** Planning policies also set out a number of other key tests that are applicable to any conversion schemes;

- The importance of good design – one that functions well, adds to and improves the built environment and responds to local character and history. (see Section 3 below);
- The importance of minimising impacts on ecological interests. (see Section 4);
- That the building should not require extensive alteration and/or extension. (See Para. 2.14 below);
- That there is appropriate access such that highway safety is not compromised; and
- That there would be no adverse impact on residential amenity.

**2.3** There are a wide variety of alternative uses for rural buildings, and some are considered more appropriate than others.

The best uses that will lead to the most successful conversion are those which respect the original character and appearance of the building and its individual structure and features. The following uses may be considered appropriate, depending on the character and location of the building:

a) **Agricultural related:** Retention for alternative agricultural uses or proposals for appropriate rural diversification. An example might be use as a farm shop selling produce from the farm itself and/ or other local produce.

b) **Commercial and industrial uses:** Uses such as storage, workshops and offices are examples that may require little alteration to the building. These types of uses can increase the opportunities for local employment opportunities within the rural area. For certain uses, consideration will need to be given to the suitability of the local roads for accommodating the associated vehicular movements.

c) **Leisure and recreation:** Many outdoor rural activities require some limited facilities and redundant rural buildings provide the ideal opportunity to provide these without having to introduce new buildings into the countryside. These types of uses not only provide for more sustainable forms of development but also widen the variety of employment opportunities in the countryside.

d) **Tourism/community uses:** Tourism and community facilities can sometimes easily be achieved without the need for extensive alterations to the original fabric of the building. Examples might be holiday accommodation, or use as a visitor centre. These types of activities are important to the regeneration of rural

areas with tourism playing an increasing important role within the local economy.

e) **Residential use:** A residential use can often be more problematic in terms of accommodating this use while retaining the original character and fabric of the building. Such use is generally only appropriate for buildings which are structurally sound; are capable of conversion without substantial alteration or extension; and where any domestic curtilage can be accommodated without creating a visual intrusion into the surrounding countryside. Furthermore, buildings in more sustainable locations, with easy access to local services and public transport are more suitable for residential conversion than those in more remote locations. The creation of live/work units can however result in a more sustainable form of development.

**2.4** Not all buildings would be regarded as suitable for re-use. Planning rules are relaxed for agricultural and forestry businesses and this means that some buildings may have been erected that would not otherwise have been permitted. Such buildings should usually be removed if they are no longer used for their intended purpose. Other buildings which were designed to be temporary or which harm the character and the appearance of the area may not be worthy of retention. To decide whether a rural building is worthy of retention and re-use, it may be useful to ask the following questions:

- Is it a permanent solid construction?
- Is it in good condition?
- Does it look as though it fits in with surrounding buildings and the landscape?

- Does it have any historic or architectural significance?
- Is it in a sustainable location?

**2.5** The extent to which the above are applicable will depend to some degree on the intended use. For some uses, including residential, the Council will need to be satisfied that the building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for substantial re-building, extension or alteration. Evidence will be required to demonstrate that the building is structurally sound and this will usually take the form of a full structural survey undertaken by an independent qualified structural surveyor/engineer.

**2.6** Re-building means the substantial replacement of parts of the original structure whilst alteration or re-modelling involves changes to the original structure. The extent to which this would be considered 'significant' will vary depending on the scale and type of building affected and the extent of the work proposed. Limited re-building is acceptable to effect repairs but where for example, a significant part of the original building has been removed or fallen into disrepair, re-building will not usually be acceptable, particularly where the building is located within the Green Belt. In exceptional circumstances a greater degree of re-building may be allowed where it involves a heritage asset. Section 3 below sets out design considerations that need to be taken into account in conversion schemes.

**2.7** It is not necessary to demonstrate that a building is redundant for agricultural purposes when seeking approval for its re-use. However, if the re-use of the building, still in active agricultural or other use would be likely to result in the need for a replacement building, then the proposal is likely to be resisted unless evidence is

submitted to demonstrate that the building is unfit or unworkable for modern farm methods or any such other current or former use.

### **B.3 General design principles**

**3.1** For any conversion to be acceptable, it is essential that the established character of the building remains in keeping with its surroundings. Decisions on conserving, retaining and converting traditional farm and other rural buildings should be based on a good understanding of their architectural and historic interest and their contribution to the character and appearance of the area. However, whilst the following design guidance focuses on more traditional rural buildings, it is recognised that there are some less traditional buildings which, in certain circumstances, may be suitable for conversion, for example for storage uses, and which require very little alteration. As there is a vast range of styles within the District and the majority of these buildings are unique, early pre-application engagement with the Planning Authority is recommended.

**3.2** The character of a rural building is derived from its original function and every effort should be made to retain the original simplicity of scale and form and to alter the building as little as possible, both internally and externally. In order to respect the character of the building, the new use should be designed around the constraints of the building rather than the use being imposed upon the building. In this respect, the following general principles should be adopted:

#### **Windows and doors**

**3.3** Every effort should be made to use existing openings within the building to the full, if necessary, by adapting the plan to suit. New door and window openings should be avoided and the high solid to void ratio

of wall to openings must be maintained. Early consideration should be given to types of joinery used for window and door openings which should be designed to reflect the character of the building. Wherever possible, existing features such as external doors and shutters and their ironmongery must be retained.

**3.4** All existing and serviceable doors in a former stable or cow shed should be retained wherever possible, or kept as shutters to simple recessed glazing, in order to retain the original external appearance. Any necessary infilling should be undertaken sensitively by recessing the infilling brickwork to retain the impression of the previous opening. The option of converting large doors to windows in the upper portion with vertical planking to the lower portion may be considered. It is essential that the window format is simple and respects the building.



Picture B.1 Example of a refurbishment that utilises existing openings



Picture B.2 An example utilising existing openings

**3.5** Large threshing doors and cart entrances are often the main feature of agricultural barns and should be incorporated in any conversion to ensure that the essential character and appearance of the building is retained. Proposals should allow the original opening to be fully exposed and visible without conflicting details. Threshing doors should be retained where they exist and if a full height glazed area is required, the tall timber doors should be fixed back to the walls. Full height glazing with a strong vertical emphasis is the most appropriate method of treatment for these large openings. Often these types of openings are found on opposite sides of a building and the full glazing areas can be used on both elevations to great effect with regards the lighting and integrity of the building, with the glazing making use of natural light to illuminate the interior.



Picture B.3 Example of utilising existing openings to maximise natural, internal light

**3.6** All doors and doorframes should retain their original width. Doors are often hung on pintle hinges set in a stone block or pegged heavy wood frame. This format deserves careful consideration and is a feature that should be retained. Any new doors should be of functional and simple design, ideally ledged and braced plank doors.

**3.7** Where original window joinery exists, this should be repaired rather than renewed where possible. Where required, new windows should match the design and detailing of surviving windows and be recessed in the reveal of existing openings. Windows that have pseudo-historical detail are alien in character to traditional farm buildings and will be resisted. New windows inserted into existing openings should utilise bespoke units composed of either timber or metal, with traditional detailing where appropriate. Standard domestic 'off the peg' style PVC, stained hardwood or aluminium windows will not be acceptable.

**3.8** Existing window cill details should be retained and replicated where appropriate. The use of projecting cills is not acceptable unless it is commensurate with the original character of the building.

**3.9** Where, in exceptional circumstances, the introduction of new window openings are necessary, they should be of a size and

position that respects the character of the building, be kept to an absolute minimum and be discretely located on the less publicly visible elevations. They should not interrupt distinctive architectural features such as ventilation holes. Care must be taken to ensure that the detailing of them is compatible with the character of other joinery work on the building and they should not visually dominate the elevations to which they are being introduced. The regular or symmetrical pattern of openings characteristic of domestic dwellings is inappropriate in the context of modest rural building such as a barn.

**3.10** Lintels over openings should be preserved where possible. Where new lintels are required, the external appearance should replicate the existing details on the building, for example natural stone, brick or timber facing.

**3.11** All doors, frames and other exposed joinery should generally have a painted finish. The colour and tone of which should be sympathetic to the building's original colour palette. Stained joinery should generally be avoided.



Picture B.4 A further example of introduced features using recycled materials to improve function and 'liveability'

## Walls

**3.12** In exceptional cases where new materials are to be used within the scheme, they should, wherever appropriate, be recycled from other parts of the building or adjoining groups of buildings. If new materials are used, they should match the existing in quality and visual style.

**3.13** Any re-pointing work should be confined to localised areas requiring repair using traditional lime based mortars and methods. Pointing and re-pointing should be carried out in such a way that the joints are kept narrow and are slightly recessed with a brushed finish. Pointing which is flush with the brickwork, or spread partially over the face of the bricks can damage the character and appearance of the building. This detail will normally be controlled by a condition on any grant of planning permission, particularly in the case of listed buildings.

**3.14** Timber framing should be repaired by splicing or piecing in new oak, keeping any such replacement to the absolute minimum. Joints should be traditional and fully detailed on the planning application drawings.

**3.15** Brick, stone and timber should never be sandblasted and mechanical cleaning using rotary carborundum heads also destroy the surface. Such abrasive techniques are damaging and will shorten the longevity of traditional materials and structures. The cleaning of historic buildings may require specialist techniques and advice should be sought before the commencement of any work.



Picture B.5 An example of localised repointing



Picture B.6 A further example of localised repointing



Picture B.7 An example showing how refurbishment should maintain an unbroken roofline



Picture B.8 A further example of a refurbishment which maintains an unbroken roofline

## Roofs

**3.16** The roof of a farm building is its most visible feature and forms a key part of the building's character. Traditional farm buildings' roofs are generally simple in character and composed of local materials.

**3.17** The roof profile, form and materials should be retained wherever possible. Traditional farm buildings have long

unbroken rooflines and it is essential that these remain undisturbed as far as possible. In some cases however, the original roof may have been lost and replaced by a modern roof. In such circumstances it may be acceptable to reinstate the roof profile at its original pitch, providing that compelling physical, documentary or photographic evidence of the historic profile is presented. In certain exceptional cases, it may be necessary to remove the original roof covering to repair the roof structure. In such cases, the original roof covering should be carefully removed and stored on site. Where materials can be salvaged, they should be reused.

**3.18** Special roof coverings such as handmade tiles or slates laid in diminishing courses should be retained with any shortfall being made up with new and/or second hand materials. Historic eaves and verge details such as corbelling or dentilations should be retained and repaired. As originally built the majority of traditional farm buildings had closed verges, clipped eaves with guttering (where present) supported on rise and fall brackets with no fascia boards. Standard modern box eaves with deep projecting fascia boards, flat soffit board and projecting barge boards will not be acceptable on traditional farm buildings.

**3.19** Modern roof detailing such as cupolas, weathervanes and dormer windows are not considered acceptable and applicants proposing to add such features will need to demonstrate that there is a historic precedent for them. Traditional farm buildings rarely had any form of glazing at roof level. Therefore, roof lights should only be used sparingly on the least conspicuous elevation and should be the flush fitting/conservation type. However, within buildings where a roof includes existing features such as haylofts, these can be retained and it may be possible to use these

for sources of light and ventilation subject to the impact of their conversion on the character of the building.

**3.20** Chimney stacks are generally uncharacteristic of rural buildings and the introduction of them will generally be regarded as inappropriate since they damage the unbroken roofline and introduce domestic characteristics into the appearance of former farm buildings. Ventilated ridge tiles or balanced flues may be appropriate. Any flues should be discretely sited, not exceed the ridge of the building, be thin and painted in an unobtrusive colour such as matt black.

**3.21** Original gutters, where present should be retained or repaired where possible. Replacements should be simple in character, half round, composed of cast metal and supported on brackets driven into the masonry without fascia boards as depicted in the illustration. The use of restoration PVC guttering may be acceptable in certain circumstances. Guttering and down pipes should be painted in an appropriate colour.



Picture B.9 A further example of repaired 'rise and fall' guttering

### Key internal and external features

**3.22** Features of importance architecturally or historically, including machinery relating to or fundamental to its original use, should be retained in-situ and integrated into the proposed conversion. Where a building is listed, particular care is needed to conserve internal historical character and surviving internal fabric and fittings.

**3.23** Roof structures can be the most impressive features of a rural building. Roof structures and trusses should be retained in their entirety and kept open to view as far as possible. Open-plan designs with the roof structure remaining unencumbered are preferred. New internal divisions to create upper floors are often difficult to incorporate without harming the character of a building. Where a building is listed, submitted plans must show how insulation, and any associated ventilation is to be accommodated.



Picture B.10 An example of an open plan interior which allows the roof structure to remain exposed

**3.24** Ventilation holes, often in the form of a cruciform, diamond or slit pattern, are fundamental in denoting former crop/hay/storage areas and should be retained. The contrast between the dark interior and the light face of the building can be enhanced by blocking such apertures from the rear or using dark glass recessed

within the apertures. Glass blocks can also provide patterns of illumination within the building. Owl holes should be retained.

**3.25** External staircases, characteristic of granaries and storage lofts, are features whose presence should not only be respected but whose potential should be fully exploited. Care must be taken when adding balustrades or non-slip surfaces, as these may be damaging to the character and appearance of the building.



Picture B.11 Picture shows important features which should be identified and retained as part of any refurbishment



Picture B.12 External stairs are an example of a feature which should be identified and retained as part of any refurbishment

### Setting in the landscape

**3.26** It is important that converted rural buildings sit comfortably in the local landscape and respect appropriate design

principles that are sensitive to the historic environment. A simple functional setting is often an essential part of the character of traditional rural buildings and therefore, the sensitive treatment of external spaces is important. Care should be taken to ensure that the curtilage is kept to a minimum, and remains as uncluttered as possible. Garden structures, play equipment and other domestic paraphernalia should be avoided within these spaces. Encroachment into the surrounding countryside for garden use, external storage, hardstanding or car parking should be avoided and would normally be resisted. Further advice can be found in the Historic Environment SPD.

**3.27** Appropriate treatment of the curtilage of the building is crucial to the retention of the rural character, particularly in areas of open countryside, high landscape quality and designated Green Belt. The use of appropriately scaled brick boundary walls close to buildings, and/or native hedgerows and field type fencing, depending on the particular circumstances are the most appropriate treatments. The use of close boarded or interwoven fencing and hedge-planting using ornamental or non-indigenous species should be avoided.

**3.28** The impact of parked cars in the landscape can be considerable and garaging should be provided within the converted building, or within adjacent outbuildings where these contribute to a group of farm buildings. Any new garage doors should be of timber, side hung vertically boarded and painted. Parking will be required at levels not exceeding the maximum standards set out in the Development Plan. Particular care needs to be given to the siting of fuel storage tanks and other essential service requirements to ensure that they are well screened and unobtrusive. Permission will not normally be given for the construction of additional buildings and structures for garaging and ancillary storage.

**3.29** Hard landscaping should reflect the rural setting of the building. Cobbled yards and raised flagstone causeways are essential historical features and should be retained and incorporated into the new scheme. Where original yards have subsequently been resurfaced in concrete, their replacement with a gravelled surface will generally be acceptable. The use of tarmac or concrete paving surfaces should be avoided. Any scheme for conversion should include all details of hard and soft landscaping, making use of indigenous species.

**3.30** Surviving features such as ponds, drinking troughs and water pumps are important farmyard features and must be retained. Protection may also be given to features such as enclosing walls and pigsties that may have little practical beneficial use but may be of interest historically. Original gates, gateposts and railings should be retained in situ and refurbished where necessary. The addition of large or ornamental gates or pillars to demarcate the entrance to the conversion will be resisted. New gates and posts, where required, should be sympathetic to the agrarian character of the building.

**3.31** Satellite dishes are inappropriate additions to rural buildings and are usually detrimental to their character and appearance. A condition removing Permitted Development rights for such features will normally be included on any planning permission for the conversion of a traditional farm building. It may be possible to site a satellite dish on, or within the curtilage of a converted building where it is discreetly located away from the public domain. Similarly, large aerials can detract from the character of traditional rural buildings and an internal aerial should be used where possible.

**3.32** External lighting, including any for security, should be kept to a minimum and be of simple functional designs. Domesticating features such as Victorian style lights, other lampposts, pergolas, ornamental ponds or water features are not acceptable in the context of traditional farm buildings.

**3.33** Wherever possible, the existing access into the site should be re-used. If this is not possible, then any new access route should follow the line of existing features in the landscape such as walls or hedges, in preference to the creation of any new route across open countryside. Where an access crosses open land then the road should remain unenclosed along its length and wide grass verges should be left alongside walls or hedges to provide wildlife habitat. Any proposed use should not generate traffic of a volume that might cause danger to existing road users.

## **B.4 Other material considerations**

### **Protected species**

**4.1** Rural buildings provide important habitats for a variety of wildlife, including species protected by law. Several species of bats, as well as barn owls, swallows, swifts and other birds regularly make use of such buildings as breeding sites. The loss or conversion of rural buildings over the past 30 years has contributed to the decline of barn owls and bats through the disturbance and loss of important breeding and resting places.

**4.2** All species of wild birds (including their nests and eggs) and all species of bats and their roosts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). All species are further protected under the Habitats Regulations 2010. Under this legislation, it is an offence to kill or harm

these animals but also to intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct any places where the animals are residing.

**4.3** The presence of a protected species will be regarded as a material consideration in the determination of any planning application. Maintaining the favourable conservation status of a protected species will be a priority but the presence of a protected species would not always preclude conversion to a new use. If properly designed and monitored, the re-use of rural buildings can retain and enhance resting and breeding sites for protected species and other wildlife.

**4.4** Prior to the submission of a planning application, an initial ecological assessment should be undertaken to establish the presence or otherwise of any protected species. In some cases, an initial survey may find the building unsuitable. However, where the survey indicates that protected species are likely to present, a full ecological assessment should then be undertaken together with a set of proposed mitigation measures. Ecological surveys should be undertaken at the appropriate time of year for the species and should be undertaken by appropriately licensed experts following best practice. These surveys, as apposite, should accompany the planning application. It will often also be necessary to secure a licence from Natural England. Further advice and guidance may be found in the Council's SPD: Biodiversity and Development or through contacting the Council's Countryside Team.

#### **Heritage assets**

**4.5** Some traditional buildings are statutorily listed due to their architectural or historic interest and/or are located within a Conservation Area. Such buildings require particular care to ensure that alterations do not compromise the architectural or historic value of the buildings or their setting. In most

cases, works to a listed building require Listed Building Consent. It is strongly recommended that you seek pre-application advice from the Council before submitting a planning or listed building application affecting heritage assets. Government policy with regard to the historic environment is set out in the NPPF and local policies are contained in the Lichfield District Local Plan Strategy. In addition, detailed practice guidance on how to achieve high quality conversions on historic farm buildings is available from Historic England via their website: Historic England: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/assets/uploads/resources/convertingbuildings.pdf> and more local evidence is available via the Staffordshire County Council website <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/countryside/conservation/conservation.htm>

**4.6** Any planning or listed building application relating to the conversion of listed building or building within a Conservation Area should be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement which should include an assessment of the significance of the heritage asset and the potential impact of the proposals on the building's significance. Non-residential uses tend to involve the least alteration to the fabric of traditional farm buildings than domestic conversions.

#### **Green Belts**

**4.7** A significant proportion of the countryside within Lichfield District comprises Green Belt. National Policy contained in the NPPF and Local Plan Policy NR2 sets out national and local policy on the Green Belt. While the construction of new buildings is generally regarded as inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless it is required for one of a small number of specified purposes such as buildings for agriculture; the re-use of buildings is not regarded as inappropriate development providing:

- The development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land in it; and
- The buildings are of permanent and substantial construction.

### Flood risk

**4.8** The NPPF outlines the overall Government strategy to guide the majority of new development to areas of low flood risk. All proposals for new development, including changes of use, require a flood risk assessment if they are located within Flood Zones 2 and 3, which are the areas of greatest flood risk and all major proposals over 1 hectare within flood zone 1 also require a Flood Risk assessment to assess the pluvial and drainage considerations. This would need to demonstrate that the development is suitably flood resilient, including safe access and escape routes where required and that any residual risk can be safely managed. Details of the Flood Zones can be found on the Environment Agency's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>

### Residential amenity

**4.9** In the case of residential conversions, the Council will expect private amenity space to be provided. As set out in Section 3.7 above, this should not include land beyond the original curtilage of the property. The amount of private amenity space should be sufficiently large for the reasonable needs of the occupants, for example, to provide external sitting space and planted areas. Normal expected minimum garden sizes are set out in the Council's Sustainable Design SPD. Where a number of dwellings are created from a large agricultural building or group of buildings, it is often the case that the subdivision of the plots by boundary walls or fences plots could detract from the

rural character and setting of the buildings. In those instances, it is likely that there will be shared courtyards or other shared amenity areas but in order to provide some level of privacy, short sections of wall extending from the rear of the properties to enclose the sides of 'patio' areas with hedge planting elsewhere may be acceptable.

**4.10** The Council would also seek to protect the privacy of both future residents and the occupants of any adjoining properties and minimum required separation distances are set out in the Council's Sustainable Design SPD.

**4.11** The conversion of buildings to certain non residential uses could also have implications for the amenities of adjoining residents in terms of noise, odours or other nuisance, depending on the particular use. For such conversion proposals, the applicants would need to demonstrate that no such harm would occur, for example, by providing appropriate noise or odour mitigation, and details of such mitigation measures would need to be included with any planning submission. Potential applicants may want to discuss the options for mitigation at an early stage with the Council's Environmental Health team.

### Permitted development rights

**4.12** The design principles set out in section 3 above are intended to ensure that the building retains its original rural character, regardless of the new use. However, it is the case that notwithstanding any care taken to achieve a sensitively designed conversion scheme, the character of the building could be harmed at a later date by ill-conceived alterations, many of which are classed as 'Permitted Development' and as such, can normally be carried out without the need to apply for planning permission. Because of this, it is common practice to use planning conditions to remove such Permitted Development

rights. This means that planning permission will normally be required for most subsequent proposals for alterations to the building. This would include for example, proposals for the insertion of new window and door openings; introduction of solar panels or satellite dishes; rendering of the walls; and any extensions to the building. Conditions would also normally restrict the erection of sheds, garages and other detached buildings and structures.

**4.13** Planning legislation now also allows, as Permitted Development, the conversion of some existing agricultural, retail and office buildings into dwellings. This is subject to a number of provisos which include restrictions on size; number of units created; extent of alteration work and period of previous use. Such Permitted Development rights do not extend to sites within a Conservation Area or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is also subject to prior approval from the Council as to the transport and highway impacts of the development; noise impacts; contamination risks; flooding risks; and location and siting. This would include the consideration of potential ecological impacts and therefore the requirements set out in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 above would also normally apply to any such applications for prior approval. Further information on Permitted Development in relation to conversion schemes can be obtained from the Development Management page of the Council's website [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk)

## B.5 Submitting an application

**5.1** Early consultation with planning officers at the pre-application stage is always recommended and details of the pre-application guidance can be found on the Council's website: [www.lichfielddc.gov.uk](http://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk)

**5.2** Proposals for a change of use of a building will require planning permission. In addition, if the building is listed, an

application for listed building consent is also likely to be necessary. Only applications for full planning permission will be acceptable. The information provided must give a clear indication of the impact the conversion will make both on the buildings and its surroundings. The employment of a skilled conservation architect or other specialist may be useful

**5.3** The planning application should contain:

- Full measured survey drawings of existing building, at 1:50 or 1:100 scale to include elevations, floor plans and sections and site plan;
- Proposed plans and elevations at 1:50 or 1:100 scale and site plan including plot boundaries, access, parking, garaging, landscaping and boundary treatments. All drawings should be clearly annotated to identify any necessary remedial works;
- Ideally, sections through the building and details of joinery, doors and windows;
- A structural survey;
- Details of the means of disposal of surface water/foul drainage based on sustainable drainage principles;
- Ecological assessment/Design and Access Statement/Heritage Statement/Flood Risk Assessment, as appropriate
- A Habitat Regulations Assessment relating to mitigation for the Cannock Chase SAC or River Mease SAC, where appropriate.

**5.4** Full details of what plans and documents are required to be submitted may be viewed on the Council's website under 'Planning Application Validation Requirements'.

**5.5** Separate consent is required under the Building Regulations which ensure that barn conversions meet the relevant building standards. This will cover a range of important issues including energy efficiency, fire safety and structural stability. Early engagement with the Building Control team at Lichfield District Council can enable more flexible and sympathetic ways to achieve compliance.