

CHAPTER 5: USE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 Crawley is a compact town surrounded by open countryside. The small area of countryside within the borough is important as a setting for the town and as a natural resource in its own right. This chapter provides the policies which will be taken into account when proposals for development and change in the countryside are considered. Policies for protecting particular aspects of the countryside, such as nature conservation sites and ancient woodlands, are included in the Built and Natural Heritage chapter.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

- 5.2 The rural area within the borough is mainly characterised by open fields, trees and hedgerows with a few areas of woodland. These natural features are interspersed with a variety of buildings, both residential and commercial. Much of the land is not of a high agricultural quality and only a small part of the area is actively farmed. Nevertheless, it contributes to the amenity of the urban area, and is increasingly appreciated by Crawley's residents as concern for the environment and interest in rural activities grows.
- 5.3 The proximity of Gatwick Airport and the urban area leads to high development pressures and to speculative land holding often with no positive or active use being made of land at present. A number of locations, particularly those close to the airport and industrial areas, the M23 and the A23, are adversely affected by noise and various forms of pollution which limit their possible uses. There are also some isolated problems such as trespass, vandalism and fly-tipping, common in urban fringe areas, which can cause problems for agriculture and other rural uses. The countryside does, however, have a significant role in education and recreation, and access into the countryside for urban residents is important. It may be possible for some landowners to diversify into other uses which will bring the land into an appropriate use and help support the area's economy whilst maintaining its rural character.

PLANNING CONTEXT

Government Guidance

- 5.4 The White Paper "This Common Inheritance" states the Government's aims for the countryside:
- (i) to encourage economic activity;
 - (ii) to conserve and improve the landscape and encourage recreation;
 - (iii) to conserve the diversity of wildlife, particularly by protecting habitats.

The UK Strategy for Sustainable Development reiterates the importance of protecting the non-renewable resources of wildlife habitats and landscape, and encourages environmentally friendly farming.

- 5.5 PPG7 stresses local authorities should enable the diversification of the rural economy, whilst controlling development to protect important landscapes, habitats and the best

and most versatile agricultural land. The re-use of buildings is acceptable in most areas, although housing should only be permitted near settlements. It recognises that positive planning and management is necessary in the urban fringe to improve landscape quality and public access.

- 5.6 PPG17 stresses the importance of the countryside for recreation which should be in harmony with the rural environment; local authorities should identify locations for recreation uses including noisy activities.

Regional Guidance

- 5.7 The guidance for the South East states that the region's countryside is a great asset. It reiterates Government guidance on resisting inappropriate development, protecting agricultural land, improving urban fringe areas and enabling rural diversification, recreation and public access.

West Sussex Structure Plan 1993

- 5.8 The Structure Plan stresses the need to protect the environment and to locate development to minimise the use of resources, including the countryside. It states local authorities should strictly control development beyond the built-up area, particularly in designated areas such as A.O.N.Bs and strategic gaps. Some development may be permissible where it will assist rural communities, encourage farming and help enhance landscapes and habitats. Quiet informal recreation is also encouraged.

STRATEGY, ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

- 5.9 The countryside within the borough is an important natural resource and contributes to the quality of the environment and the quality of the life within the borough. Its protection and improvement is therefore important in fulfilling the objectives of the Local Plan Strategy. This chapter provides policies which will help ensure that the open character and essential features of the countryside and the rural economy are protected and enhanced for future generations.
- 5.10 Government and strategic guidance both stress the need for the appropriate diversification of agricultural land. All the countryside within the borough is immediately adjacent to the major employment centres of Crawley and Gatwick Airport and development which is necessary to promote employment in an isolated rural area may not be appropriate in Crawley's countryside. However, sustainable uses for the countryside and existing buildings within the borough need to be sought. Positive uses, such as recreation, can provide an income and an incentive to ensure landowners manage and maintain countryside resources. The countryside should be accessible to Crawley's residents and should provide a distinctly different environment from the urban area.
- 5.11 The following objectives provide the framework for the policies of this chapter:

Objectives for the Countryside

Objective 1

To protect and enhance the countryside around Crawley.

- 5.12 The countryside is a valuable natural resource for wildlife habitats, agriculture and forestry. Once lost it cannot be regained and it therefore needs to be protected from

development. It is also important that the character of Crawley as a town in an attractive rural setting is protected.

Objective 2

To encourage the positive use and management of all areas of the countryside and the diversification of agricultural land.

- 5.13 The positive use of land will help enhance the appearance of the landscape and increase opportunities for rural activity and economic prosperity. There is a need to identify uses which can make use of existing buildings and enhance the landscape whilst maintaining the predominantly open character of the area.

Objective 3

To maintain and improve public access to the countryside.

- 5.14 Public access to appropriate areas is important to enable the full potential of the countryside for recreation and education to be realised. Public access has to be balanced with the needs of agriculture and with the protection of wildlife habitats, but it can help raise public awareness of the local countryside which benefits its protection.

Objective 4

To promote the sustainable use of the countryside.

- 5.15 Limiting unnecessary development beyond the built-up area helps protect valuable natural resources which cannot be replaced. It also helps concentrate development in the built-up area which reduces the need to travel. Some uses can be sustainable in the countryside, particularly if they involve the open use of land, and are accessible by a variety of means of transport.

POLICIES

PROTECTION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Development Beyond the Built-up Area Boundary

Policy C1

Planning permission will not normally be granted for development beyond the built-up area boundary which is unrelated to the needs of agriculture or forestry. Where the proposal is fully justified, development for the purposes of rural diversification, park and ride car parks, waste disposal, recreation and leisure, and the generation of renewable energy may be acceptable, provided its impact on the appearance and character of the surrounding countryside is minimised.

- 5.16 The built-up area boundary has been defined on the Proposals Map, in accordance with guidance given in Policy G3 of the Structure Plan. The boundary includes the existing built-up area and sites which are allocated or have planning permission for development which is not normally acceptable in the countryside. The boundary around the North East Sector encloses the area currently being considered for development and may be altered once the proposals for the development of the area have been finalised. The countryside beyond the boundary is the area which should be protected from irreversible development and change as it is an important natural

resource and provides the setting for the urban area. Development for rural

diversification is acceptable if it helps support the economy of the area and provides a positive use for land or existing buildings. Park and ride car parks, to be successful, have to intercept traffic on the main routes into the town and may, therefore, need to be located beyond the built up area. Waste disposal and the generation of renewable energy are normally inappropriate within the built-up area and therefore such development may need to be permitted in the countryside. Some recreation and leisure uses can be acceptable if they do not affect the open character of the countryside, provide a positive use for land which might otherwise be neglected, and help improve public access. Enabling the generation of renewable energy is important in promoting sustainable development.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Strategic Gaps

Policy C2

Strategic gaps will be maintained between:

- **Crawley and Gatwick Airport / Horley;**
- **Crawley and Pease Pottage;**
- **Crawley and Horsham.**

- 5.17 Policy C5 of the 1993 Structure Plan requires local plans to define strategic gaps with the objectives of preventing the coalescence of settlements and retaining their separate identity and amenity. The principle of maintaining open gaps between settlements stems from the draft Written Statement of the first West Sussex Structure Plan, 1977, which proposed to extend the Surrey Metropolitan Green Belt into West Sussex around Crawley. This proposal was not accepted by the Secretary of State for the Environment. He did, however, recognise the importance of the open areas of land between Crawley and Horsham, Crawley and Gatwick Airport and Crawley and East Grinstead, and particularly identified the development pressures affecting the land between Crawley and Gatwick Airport. The Secretary of State stated that policies should be introduced to protect these open gaps and that the policies should be applied as rigorously as Metropolitan Green Belt policy. The approved Structure Plan, 1980, set out the strategic gap policy for these areas, which has been continued in subsequent Structure Plans. The Crawley-Pease Pottage Strategic Gap was defined by West Sussex County Council in the Structure Plan Proposed First Alteration, 1985, and was accepted by the Secretary of State.
- 5.18 Land that is identified as strategic gap on the Proposals Map is the land that is considered necessary to protect from development in order to fulfill the objectives of the policy. The countryside surrounding Gatwick Airport has been included because the airport exerts considerable pressure for development. A distinct boundary to the airport and a clear break of open countryside between the airport and Crawley, Horley and Charlwood is important to maintain the character and separate identity of the airport and the surrounding settlements. The other strategic gaps form continuations of more extensive gaps within neighbouring districts.
- 5.19 All the land defined as strategic gap was identified as such within the 1993 Local Plan. Land has been removed from the Crawley / Gatwick Strategic Gap to comply with the housing requirements of the Structure Plan which constitute compelling circumstances. Small changes have been made to the Crawley / Horsham Strategic Gap so that its boundary is clear and follows distinct physical features. The areas removed from the gap which are not allocated for a specific purpose remain beyond the built-up area boundary and are covered by countryside protection policies. They are not areas reserved for future development. The Borough Council is considering

positive measures which will help enhance the landscape quality of the strategic gaps in the borough whilst maintaining their objectives. One such proposal is the Millennium Forest, the aim of which is to create a multi-purpose mixed woodland as an attractive landscape feature to clearly separate Crawley, Gatwick Airport and Horley. This would strengthen the strategic gap and give it long term protection. The existence within the strategic gap of a secure area of Forest encompassing most, if not all, of its length and breadth could result in changes to the planning context for the area. If the Forest is secured, the Borough Council will consider whether it would be appropriate to bring forward alterations to the Plan to reflect the new situation.

Implementation: CBC forward planning process.

Policy C3

Within the policy framework set by Policy C1, only in compelling circumstances will development be permitted in strategic gaps. Compelling circumstances are more likely to be demonstrated with regard to proposals for development for the following purposes than for any other type of development :

- a) agriculture**
- b) forestry**
- c) waste disposal**
- d) recreation and leisure which meets the criteria of Policy C13**
- e) development necessary to satisfy the operational requirements of Crawley Sewage Treatment Works.**

The potential impact of these, and any other developments for which there are compelling arguments, upon the countryside and the objectives of the strategic gap, will be given full regard.

- 5.20 In order to fulfil the objectives of strategic gaps, it is necessary to keep them generally free from built development and urban activity. Development which has a limited visual impact or which is low density and well-landscaped may not be appropriate in a strategic gap because residential, employment and traffic activity can still reduce the perception of a break between settlements. There must, therefore, be compelling circumstances for any development in the gap. The Structure Plan recognises that the need for development for agriculture, forestry, waste disposal and quiet informal recreation may exceptionally be regarded as compelling because agriculture and forestry can only take place in the countryside, waste disposal is inappropriate in the built up area and there are limited opportunities for informal recreation. In Crawley, the pressure for recreational uses within the built up area is such that it may be appropriate to allow a wider range of open space recreational uses within the strategic gaps to meet the needs of the local community. Crawley Sewage Treatment Works is located within the strategic gap. Development for operational purposes may be regarded as compelling. Where there is a compelling case for development at the Sewage Treatment Works, such development should not exceed the height of existing buildings or lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Policy C4

Within strategic gaps, the following developments will not be required to meet the compelling circumstances test of Policy C3, provided they do not significantly increase the level of activity of the site:

- (i) small- scale extensions, alterations and other works within the curtilage of residential buildings;**
- (ii) small- scale extensions and alterations to non- residential buildings;**
- (iii) changes of use which are to be contained wholly within the existing buildings on a site and which do not significantly increase parking requirements or traffic movements.**

These proposals will be judged on their impact on the countryside and the open character of the gap and must meet the criteria of Policies C7 and C8.

- 5.21 Some small-scale extensions and changes of use of existing buildings are so minor that they have little impact on the open character and appearance of the countryside and do not increase the level of urban activity in an area. They do not therefore compromise the objectives of strategic gaps and may, subject to other matters being acceptable, be appropriate to permit.

Implementation: CBC development control process. Conditions may be imposed to remove permitted development rights for subsequent changes of use and extensions.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**Policy C5**

Only in compelling circumstances will development be permitted where it would be harmful to the nationally important visual quality and distinctive characteristics of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (A.O.N.B.).

Compelling circumstances are more likely to be demonstrated with regard to proposals for development for the following purposes than for any other type of development:

- a) agriculture**
- b) forestry**
- c) waste disposal**
- d) recreation and leisure which meets the criteria of Policy C13**

Applications for major developments will need to be accompanied by an environmental assessment and will only be permitted if there is an overriding national interest and no acceptable alternative site is available.

(Cont.)

Policy C5 (cont.)

Where, exceptionally, planning permission is to be granted, development should be of a high standard of design and in sympathy with the landscape, and should meet the criteria in Policies C7 and C8.

Development outside but near to a designated A.O.N.B. will not normally be permitted if it would be unduly prominent in, or detract from views into or out of the area.

The Borough Council will encourage schemes which will improve the quality of the landscape or increase opportunities for quiet informal recreation in the A.O.N.B.

- 5.22 The designation of the High Weald as an A.O.N.B. recognises and aims to conserve the attractive landscape and significant geological, ecological and scenic qualities of this important part of the region's countryside. A small part of the south west of the borough is included within the A.O.N.B. and any proposed development in this area must respect the special qualities of the landscape. In accordance with the Structure Plan, development which will be harmful to the visual quality of the A.O.N.B. will only be permitted in compelling circumstances. The Structure Plan and the Countryside Commission's A.O.N.B. Policy state major development is likely to be inconsistent with the A.O.N.B. designation and such applications therefore need to be accompanied by an environmental assessment and will only be permitted in the national interest. Another objective of designation is to promote public access and quiet, informal recreation within the A.O.N.B., where this does not detract from the appearance of the landscape.

Implementation: CBC development control and forward planning processes, Countryside Management Projects.

Protection of Agricultural Land

Policy C6

Proposals for development which causes the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land and important areas of woodland outside the built-up area, or results in the sub-division of good agricultural holdings into unproductive units will not normally be permitted.

- 5.23 Agriculture requires the extensive use of land. Once agricultural land is developed it is very unlikely it will be returned to agricultural use in the future. The best and most versatile agricultural land, (Grades 1, 2 and 3A in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food agricultural land classification system), should normally, therefore, be protected from development. Development can also result in the sub-division of agricultural holdings into units which may be too small or too dispersed to be productive. The land may then become subject to neglect and deterioration and prone to development pressures. Wherever possible, this should be anticipated and avoided.

Implementation: CBC development control process. Applications for the diversification of parts of agricultural holdings should indicate how the entire farm will be maintained as a working unit.

SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Existing Buildings

Policy C7

Proposals for the change of use and conversion of existing agricultural or other non-residential buildings outside the built-up area will be permitted if:

- (i) the building's structure is in reasonable condition and suitable for the new purpose without complete or substantial reconstruction, and if it has been used for its original purpose.**
- (ii) the proposed use, including any storage, can be contained within the building or involves the open use of surrounding land without changing its appearance or character;**
- (iii) the proposed use would not generate traffic of a type or amount inappropriate to the rural roads or require improvements which would be out of keeping with the surroundings;**
- (iv) the majority of parking requirements are met on existing areas of hardstanding;**
- (v) advertisements and signs are kept to a minimum.**

Extensions, alterations and other minor works will only be permitted if they:

- (i) are unobtrusive in the landscape;**
- (ii) do not significantly alter the form and bulk of the existing building;**
- (iii) preserve the existing character of the building and its landscape setting.**

5.24 There are numerous commercial and agricultural buildings beyond the built-up area in which new uses can be acceptable if the buildings can be used without complete or substantial reconstruction. The criteria in the policy help ensure changes of use, conversions or extensions do not adversely affect the character and appearance of the rural area.

Implementation: CBC development control process. Conditions may be imposed to restrict permitted development rights for subsequent changes and extensions.

Policy C8

Proposals for the extension of existing residential buildings outside the built-up area will only be permitted if the extension:

- (i) is ancillary to the main accommodation and relates well to the existing dwelling;**
- (ii) does not significantly alter the form and bulk of the existing dwelling;**
- (iii) preserves the existing character of the dwelling and its landscape setting.**

5.25 Extensions to residential buildings in the countryside need to be subject to greater control than would be the case in the built-up area because of the effect they can have on the appearance and character of the countryside. Whilst the sub-division of large rural houses into separate dwelling units can sometimes be a useful addition to dwelling stock, it is not usually appropriate if it involves significant extensions to the existing building, especially extensions which can affect the character and appearance of the countryside.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Policy C9

Proposals for the replacement of a residential building outside the built-up area will only be accepted if:

- (i) the dwelling still exists and could be used for residential purposes without complete or substantial reconstruction;**
- (ii) the new dwelling is not fundamentally different from the scale, character or location of the existing dwelling;**
- (iii) the new dwelling reflects the character of the area.**

5.26 If a replacement building is significantly different to the existing building it could have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. A new building similar in scale and character to the existing building can be acceptable because it would not have an increased impact on the local environment.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Agricultural Development

Policy C10

Proposals for development in the countryside reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture or horticulture will be permitted if its impact on the countryside, landscape and existing buildings is minimised.

New agricultural development and buildings should not be located in prominent locations, should be grouped where possible and should be compatible in scale and colour with existing buildings and the countryside.

- 5.27 Agriculture is an appropriate activity in the countryside. Planning permission is required for some agricultural development, particularly larger scale development, and this policy will help ensure that such development respects the objective of protecting the environment and does not introduce intrusive, urban or large-scale buildings which affect the appearance of the countryside.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Policy C11

Proposals for the development of farm shops will be permitted if :

- i) the shop is ancillary to the operation of the farm holding;**
- ii) the shop is situated on or adjacent to the holding;**
- iii) the majority of goods sold are grown on the holding or neighbouring holdings.**

- 5.28 Farm diversification is encouraged and farm shops selling produce grown on the farm can help provide some added income. Significant retail activity is, however, inappropriate in the countryside and therefore the shop should only be of a scale justified as an outlet for goods primarily produced on the holding or neighbouring holdings.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Policy C12

The Borough Council will only permit agricultural or horticultural developments outside the built-up area which are not associated with the open use of adjacent land if :

- (i) the impact of the proposal is minimised and maintains the rural character and appearance of the surrounding area;**
- (ii) the proposal is carefully designed and sited and is compatible in scale with existing buildings.**

5.29 Some forms of agriculture and horticulture such as garden centres, battery chicken units or co-operative buildings for packing or distribution do not rely directly on the extensive use of adjacent agricultural land. Planning permission is required for large-scale developments of this type and, as they can have almost as much impact on the countryside as an industrial or retail development, they need to be carefully controlled.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Development for Recreation and Leisure

Policy C13

Proposals for recreation and leisure development will be permitted provided that:

- (i) the proposal is predominantly open in character;**
- (ii) existing buildings are used as far as possible;**
- (iii) any essential new buildings and parking facilities are ancillary to the recreation or leisure use and carefully designed and sited with a minimal impact on the surrounding countryside;**
- (iv) there is no adverse impact on neighbouring buildings or other rural environmental considerations.**
- (v) satisfactory access can be provided without adversely affecting the appearance and open character of the countryside;**

5.30 The open areas around Crawley have an important role for recreation and leisure, particularly for informal activities such as walking and cycling. Other uses such as playing fields and golf courses can also be consistent with the objective of maintaining the open nature of the countryside. It is, however, important that recreation and leisure uses preserve the appearance of the landscape and do not conflict with nature conservation interests, particularly Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and ancient woodlands, or the use of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The amenity of nearby housing should also be protected. New buildings which may be considered appropriate include changing rooms, stables and unobtrusive spectator accommodation.

Implementation: CBC development control process.

Policy C14

Proposals for noisy recreation activities will be strictly controlled and will only be permitted if:

- (i) they will not generate an unacceptable level and/ or frequency of noise which has an adverse effect on the character and amenity of the surrounding area and properties;**
- (ii) the criteria in Policy C13 are met.**

5.31 PPG 17 requires local authorities to give consideration to the location of noisy recreation activities, such as motor sports, war games and model aircraft flying which are increasing in popularity. There may be sites within the borough which could be suitable for these activities but they would need to be in locations where such activities will not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area.

Implementation: CBC development control process. Conditions may be imposed limiting the hours and frequency of use and the number of participants. Temporary permissions may be granted so that the impact of the activity can be assessed.

Policy C15

Proposals for development for equestrian activities will only be permitted if:

- (i) new buildings are carefully designed and sited, and are of an appropriate scale with minimal impact on the open character of the countryside;**
- (ii) access and parking arrangements are adequate and do not have an adverse impact on the countryside;**
- (iii) the proposal will not lead to extensive surface damage due to overgrazing or erosion, either on site or in the locality.**

Sites located on quiet roads, and near bridleways or toll rides will be preferred.

5.32 Equestrian activities are increasing in popularity and are usually appropriate in the countryside. However, the buildings associated with horses such as stables, field shelters, storerooms and indoor schools can sometimes have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the countryside if they are not carefully designed, sited and maintained. Parking and access are important considerations, particularly where commercial equestrian centres are proposed.

Implementation: CBC development control process. To avoid road safety problems conditions may be imposed to ensure suitable exercise facilities are provided on site or in agreement with neighbours.

Public Access to the Countryside

Policy C16

The Borough Council will permit, undertake and encourage proposals which increase public access to the countryside through access agreements, the provision of new public rights of way and the improved maintenance of existing routes. Particular emphasis will be given to the maintenance and creation of routes which can be used by people with mobility problems and to new routes which will link existing rights of way.

- 5.33 Public access to the countryside provides the opportunity for quiet, informal recreation. The maintenance and increased provision of public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways and cycleways) is therefore important. People with mobility problems have difficulty using rural rights of way which are often narrow, with uneven surfaces and obstacles such as stiles. Improved provision is therefore important.

Implementation: CBC forward planning and development control processes, WSCC as highway authority, Countryside Management Projects.

ENHANCEMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Policy C17

The Borough Council will permit, undertake and encourage proposals to improve and enhance the landscape outside the built-up area through countryside management initiatives and other improvement programmes.

Measures which will be promoted include:

- (i) tree and hedgerow planting;**
- (ii) improved management of woodlands for their nature conservation, amenity and recreation value and as a source of renewable energy;**
- (iii) the removal or screening of eyesores;**
- (iv) the restoration of landfill sites, mineral workings and other degraded land to an appropriate after-use;**
- (v) the removal of rubbish;**
- (vi) the management of areas important for nature conservation.**

- 5.34 Some of the countryside surrounding Crawley suffers problems common in urban fringe environments, such as neglect, fly-tipping and trespass. The Borough Council will promote measures to overcome these problems, both through the enhancement and careful management of its own land and by encouraging other landowners to do the same. Tree planting, for example, is important because trees and woodlands form valuable landscape features and wildlife habitats in the countryside. They can also have a recreation role and coppicing is a developing form of renewable energy. Government tree planting targets are not being met nationally and the Borough

Council will continue its programme of tree planting on its own land and will encourage other landowners to plant trees. Improvement programmes and initiatives are often introduced by various organisations to enhance the countryside. These may involve public, private and voluntary sector interests crossing District and County Council boundaries and can be very beneficial. The Borough Council will therefore support these initiatives.

- 5.35 The Borough Council submitted a bid for a grant from the Millennium Commission for the creation of a multi-purpose, mixed woodland between Crawley and Gatwick Airport. The proposed Forest would enhance the local landscape, mitigate the environmental impacts of the airport, increase local bio-diversity and provide new opportunities for public access, recreation, education and employment. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful but the Borough Council will now consider whether the proposals can still be achieved. If the Forest is secured, the Borough Council will consider whether it would be appropriate to bring forward alterations to the Plan to reflect the new situation.

Implementation: CBC forward planning and development control processes, CBC Leisure Services, Countryside Management Projects, WSCC through the Minerals and Waste Local Plans.

MONITORING

- 5.36 The main test of the strategy adopted in this chapter and of the effectiveness of its policies and proposals, is the extent to which the Plan's objectives for the countryside are met. These stress achievement of the correct balance between protection of the countryside and its positive use.
- 5.37 Most policies require monitoring through regular review of planning decisions and of the implementation of proposals. In addition, periodic assessment is required of:
- the general situation, or degree of progress made in protecting and improving the countryside;
 - the extent of new or improved rights of way and of access to new development (C16);
 - the impact of changes of use and conversions (C4, C7 and C13);
 - the extent of urban fringe problems (C17), together with an audit of tree cover.