

4 Housing in the Countryside

Introduction

4.1 As 90% of the District is rural in character and 74% is also within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the Council is aware of its responsibility to ensure, through its planning policies, the conservation and enhancement of the unique landscape character and environmental qualities that define West Berkshire. Approximately 64,000 or 44% of the total population of West Berkshire live in the rural areas, both inside and outside the AONB.

4.2 In comparison the surrounding urban areas of Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon and Didcot have a total population of over 1.2 million. The rural area, with its attractive environment and close proximity to these centres, and with excellent transport links to other major urban areas, including London, is under constant pressure for new development.

4.3 The Council needs to encourage and support a thriving rural economy whilst at the same time protecting the area from harmful development.

Planning Context

4.4 The countryside housing policies are set within the context of the NPPF and the adopted Core Strategy, and supported by other relevant documents such as the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan⁽⁴⁾.

4.5 The Core Strategy proposes appropriate and sustainable growth within the AONB, with housing focused on the rural service centres and service villages with an emphasis on meeting local housing needs. Core Strategy Policy Area Delivery Plan Policies 1, 4, 5, and 6 provide the context for all proposed residential development within and in the setting of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by seeking to protect the impact on its special qualities and the natural beauty of the AONB landscape.

4.6 Cumulative impact is a particularly important consideration as incremental changes when viewed collectively can significantly change the character of the landscape. A particular landscape may be able to accommodate one newly built dwelling but if this is repeated on other sites in the locality, the overall effect could alter the landscape character of the area. Also, a seemingly minor development can have a major impact where for example, small cottages are replaced with much larger houses. There may be no increase in the number of dwellings but when existing small scale residential development, or agricultural buildings, are replaced with large houses, a scene that was once comprised of isolated agricultural workers cottages and barns set within open fields is urbanised and the rural character altered.

4.7 An assessment therefore, has to be made of the sensitivity of the landscape to a particular type of change and the subsequent capacity of that area to absorb the change. For some areas, the character may be so fragile that new housing development is not acceptable even on a small scale. There may also be a rare circumstance when a particular housing scheme is considered to be essential, even though it has an adverse impact. This approach to be followed is referred to in the NPPF and the Core Strategy.

4.8 Any major development in the AONB is restricted to exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest.

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4.9 In the wider countryside, residential development will be restricted to the provision of rural workers accommodation, or the conversion or replacement of an existing dwelling. Where development impacts on the AONB, or its setting, an assessment will be needed of the impact on the special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape. Outside the AONB, permitted development rights are less restrictive than in the AONB.

Assessing the impact of development on landscape character

4.10 The term 'landscape character'⁽⁵⁾ covers the physical, visual, ecological, historical, access and recreation, cultural, economic and social issues which together make up our understanding and appreciation of external landscape surroundings. Assessing the impact of development on the character of the landscape, both within and outside the AONB, in accordance with Core strategy policy CS19, should be done through the use of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). LCA is particularly valuable when looking at landscape sensitivity, whether that is:

- i. Overall sensitivity: the sensitivity of the landscape itself, irrespective of the type of change. This is a combination of:
 1. The sensitivity of the landscape resource (in terms of its character as a whole and the individual elements contributing to that character);
 2. The visual sensitivity of the landscape, assessed through factors such as views, visibility, the number and nature of people perceiving the landscape and the scope for mitigating visual impact: or
- ii. Landscape sensitivity to a particular type of change; the interactions between the landscape, the way it is perceived and the nature of the type of change or development proposed.

4.11 Once the landscape sensitivity of an area is established then the capacity of that landscape to accommodate change can be established. Where appropriate, proposals for development should therefore, be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which assesses both the landscape and the visual effects of the development proposed.

⁵ For the purpose of this DPD the Council has used the European Landscape Convention definition of landscape "An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." (Council of Europe 2000). It applies to all landscapes, towns and villages, as well as open countryside; and ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are afforded protection. The ELC was signed by the UK Government in February 2006 and became binding from March 2007.

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Housing in the Countryside Policies

Policy C 1

Location of New Housing in the Countryside

There is a presumption in favour of development and redevelopment within the settlement boundaries of the following settlements:

Aldermaston	East Garston	Newbury
Aldermaston Wharf	East Ilsley	Pangbourne
Ashmore Green	Eastbury	Peasemore
Beenham	Enborne Row	Stockcross
Boxford	Great Shefford	Streatley
Bradfield	Greenham	Tadley/Pamber Heath
Bradfield Southend	Hampstead Norreys	Thatcham
Brightwalton	Hermitage	Theale
Brightwalton Green	Hungerford	Tidmarsh
Brimpton	Kintbury	Eastern Urban Area (Tilehurst, Calcot, Purley)
Burghfield Bridge	Lambourn	Upper Basildon
Burghfield Common	Leckhampstead	West Ilsley
Chieveley	Lower Basildon	Woolhampton
Cold Ash	Mortimer	Yattendon
Compton		

There will be a presumption against new residential development outside of the settlement boundaries. Exceptions to this are limited to rural exception housing schemes, conversion of redundant buildings, housing to accommodate rural workers and extension to or replacement of existing residential units. All proposals will need to satisfy the other policies in this section of the Plan. In settlements in the countryside with no defined settlement boundary, limited infill development may be considered where:

- i. It is within a closely knit cluster of 10 or more existing dwellings adjacent to, or fronting an existing highway; and
- ii. The scale of development consists of infilling a small undeveloped plot commensurate with the scale and character of existing dwellings within an otherwise built up frontage; and

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- iii. It does not extend the existing frontage; and
- iv. The plot size and spacing between dwellings is similar to adjacent properties and respects the rural character and street scene of the locality.

Planning permission will not be granted where a proposal harms or undermines the existing relationship of the settlement within the open countryside, where it contributes to the character and distinctiveness of a rural area, including the natural beauty of the AONB or where development would have an adverse cumulative impact on the environment or highway safety.

Supporting Text

4.12 New development is easiest to assimilate when located within existing settlements. The overall spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy for West Berkshire is set out in Policy ADPP1 in the Core Strategy. The policy seeks to accommodate development in the most sustainable way, focusing the majority of development in settlements with existing facilities and services.

4.13 Policy ADPP1 makes reference to smaller villages with settlement boundaries which are suitable for limited infill development. These settlements are currently set out in saved policy HSG1 which will be replaced by Policy C1 upon adoption of this Housing Site Allocations DPD. The settlements within the settlement hierarchy will have revised settlement boundaries as a result of housing allocations stemming from of the Local Plan.

4.14 Planning guidance advises that blanket policies restricting housing development should be avoided unless there is robust evidence on why this is necessary. The conservation and enhancement of the AONB and its setting and a recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside whilst supporting rural communities within it are key considerations. However, there may be circumstances where limited infill development (one or two units) may be possible in settlements without a defined settlement boundary where it is appropriately located within a group of existing dwellings.

4.15 For all housing proposals in the countryside, the applicant should illustrate the appropriateness of the development within the rural context by providing the following supporting evidence:

- i. an assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposals'
- ii. impact on the highway network both in terms of alterations to the existing highway and increase in all forms of traffic on the wider network'
- iii. measures proposed to provide for, or encourage, sustainable transport, pedestrian access to existing footpaths, and sources of sustainable energy'
- iv. plot size, curtilage and boundary treatments'
- v. the use of materials acceptable within the local architectural context'
- vi. impact on quality of dark skies with mitigation measures where required'
- vii. foul and surface water disposal'
- viii. landscaping including native species'
- ix. ground moulding, if any, with priority to retaining the natural slope.

4.16 In the countryside, development is restricted. The exceptions are covered by the remainder of the policies in this section of the DPD.

4.17 There may be a special circumstance, where a new home of truly outstanding design standards, reflecting the highest standards of architecture is proposed. These will be considered on their individual merits.

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Policy C 2**Rural Housing Exception Policy**

Small scale 'Rural Exception' Housing schemes will be permitted adjacent to rural settlements to meet a local housing need. Such schemes will respond to a need identified through a local needs survey for a parish or group of parishes. The affordable housing within the scheme must remain affordable in perpetuity.

Schemes must take into account the potential impact on the local character, its relationship with the existing settlement, the wider landscape and whether more sustainable alternatives are available locally.

Within the AONB and its setting, the overriding consideration will be the impact arising from the new development on its setting and special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape.

It is expected that rural exception sites will deliver 100% affordable housing. In some cases, a proportion of market housing may be acceptable where this enables the closing of a funding gap for the delivery of the affordable housing within the scheme. The market homes should be integrated with the affordable homes to form a single scheme. Where market housing is being used to financially support a Rural Exception Housing scheme, the following detailed evidence is required:

- i. a financial appraisal demonstrating the viability of the scheme and the financial relationship between open market and affordable housing
- ii. the measures being taken to ensure the use of the affordable housing is to meet local needs in perpetuity
- iii. the relationship of open market housing to meeting local need, in terms of location, design, visual character, and type of accommodation.

Supporting Text

4.18 The rural exception sites policy relates to the provision of small scale sites to meet an identified local housing need associated with rural communities. There has to be a very strong case for allowing such development anywhere in the rural area, both inside and outside the AONB. The provision for other types of affordable housing is focused in the main urban areas and rural service centres, alongside general housing development. Rural exception sites will not therefore, be permitted in the countryside adjacent to these areas.

4.19 'Rural Exception Housing', is allowed for within the terms of the NPPF as an exception to policy. The schemes are intended to be small in scale and meet an identified need established in a parish housing needs study for affordable housing for a settlement or parish (or group of villages) to which the proposal relates. Local need is restricted to meeting the needs of households that have an existing connection with the area in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy⁽⁶⁾ and are unable to access housing without publicly funded financial assistance.

4.20 The Council encourages Parish Councils to have an up-to-date Housing Needs Survey and to work closely with the District Rural Housing Enabler who is able to provide advice on funding opportunities. Rural Exceptions Housing is subject to all the normal planning considerations. In

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addition, schemes should be well related to the existing settlement and care should be taken to ensure they do not result in isolated development in the countryside because of the impact on landscape character of the area and access for occupants to public transport, education and other essential facilities including for example, access to foul drainage infrastructure.

Supporting Evidence - Local Housing Needs Survey

4.21 Housing being brought forward on the basis of overriding local need must be accompanied by a statement setting out the evidence both of the need and to justify a particular location. The evidence must be sufficient to demonstrate that a genuine need exists, how the proposed development intend to meet that need and that all suitable alternative sites in the same locality have been considered that might have less impact and/or be more sustainable. The development must be designed and developed as part of one cohesive scheme.

4.22 A recent change in Government policy is that a Rural Exception Site may include an element of open market housing to help with funding the scheme. However, this must be clearly justified. If a rural exception scheme requires an element of market housing, there is a presumption that the development will have the least amount of open market housing required to help finance the scheme. The number of market houses will depend on the individual circumstances and assessed on a site by site basis. If open market housing dominates the housing mix, then the scheme no longer qualifies as Rural Exception Housing and will be contrary to policy. The proportion of market houses should be small in relation to the overall number of housing units proposed on the rural exception site. The Council will require open book accounting as part of any approval.

Supporting Evidence - Viability

4.23 The Council will require a detailed submission setting out why any open market housing element is necessary, how the scale of market housing proposed supports the funding of the rural exception housing and why alternative funding mechanisms have not been used, including Parish receipts from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments. The overriding consideration is the exceptional need for local affordable housing and it must be shown that the scheme provides housing for local households in perpetuity.

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Policy C 3**Design of Housing in the Countryside**

The design of new housing, including rural housing exception sites, conversions, extensions and replacement dwellings, must have regard to the impact individually and collectively on the landscape character of the area and its sensitivity to change.

Development should be designed having regard to the character of the area in which it is located taking account of the local settlement and building character. It should also have regard to Quality Design – West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document, Conservation Area Appraisals and community planning documents such as Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements, the design principles set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan and on the rural environment.

Supporting Text

4.24 It is essential that new development harmonises with any distinctive local characteristics. This does not prevent proposals for outstanding examples of modern design, the overriding consideration should be the impact on the landscape and on local character in accordance with Core Strategy policies CS14 and CS19.

4.25 The NPPF (paragraphs 56 to 68) stresses the importance of good design and the need for Planning Authorities to provide clear guidance within their plans without being over prescriptive:

'...Should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally.'

4.26 In assessing the development's contribution to achieving high quality and inclusive design, the Council will take account of the Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Documents⁽⁷⁾ and Conservation Area Appraisals which are useful references for all applicants. There are also a number of town, village and parish design statements which have been adopted by the Council which should be used to inform proposals for development in accordance with Core Strategy policy CS19. The North Wessex Down AONB Management Plan should inform proposals within the AONB.

4.27 In assessing the potential impact on local landscape particular regard will be had to the sensitivity of the landscape to the particular type of development being proposed and the capacity of that landscape to be able to accommodate that type of development without significant effects on its overall landscape character.

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Supporting Evidence

4.28 Applicants are encouraged to provide the following verifiable evidence to support relevant proposals:

- i. an assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposals,
- ii. impact on the highway network both in terms of alterations to the existing highway and increase in all forms of traffic on the wider network,
- iii. measures proposed to provide for, or encourage, sustainable transport, pedestrian access to existing footpaths, and sources of sustainable energy,
- iv. impact on the need for all forms of supporting infrastructure including social, medical and educational needs,
- v. plot size, curtilage and boundary treatments,
- vi. the use of materials and detailing acceptable within the local architectural context,
- vii. impact on any protected species and the measures being taken to avoid and mitigate such impact, together with any measures to enhance biodiversity,
- viii. impact on any historical or archaeological interests and the measures being taken to mitigate such impact,
- ix. impact on quality of dark skies with mitigation measures where required,
- x. flood risk assessment and mitigation where required,
- xi. foul and surface water disposal,
- xii. use of porous materials for all hard surfaces,
- xiii. tree survey, measures to protect existing trees and important hedgerows during and after construction works,
- xiv. landscaping including species and a planting schedule,
- xv. groundmoulding, if any, with priority to retaining the natural slope.

4.29 It is important to reiterate the significance attached to cumulative impacts. When assessing an application, consideration will be given to the impact of the scheme taking into account existing, approved and proposed development in the same locality.

Policy C 4

Conversion of Existing Redundant Buildings in the Countryside to Residential Use

The conversion of existing redundant buildings to residential use will be permitted providing that:

- i. the proposal involves a building that is structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration ; and
- ii. the applicant can prove the building is genuinely redundant and a change to a residential use will not result in a subsequent request for a replacement building; and
- iii. the environment is suitable for residential use and gives a satisfactory level of amenity for occupants; and
- iv. it has no adverse impact on; does not affect rural character and the creation of the residential curtilage would not be visually intrusive, have a harmful effect on the rural character of the site, or its setting in the wider landscape; and
- v. the conversion retains the character, fabric and historic interest of the building and uses matching materials where those materials are an essential part of the character of the building and locality; and
- vi. the impact on any protected species is assessed and measures proposed to mitigate such impacts.

Supporting Text

4.30 This policy applies to all existing buildings that are structurally sound including for example, community or educational facilities and agricultural buildings. However, not all buildings will be suitable for conversion, due to their unsuitable location, condition or appearance of the structure. It may be a relatively modern agricultural building or an inappropriate scale or material to be re-used for a dwelling. Where a building being converted is located within the AONB or its setting, it will be expected to make a positive contribution to enhancing the special qualities and the natural beauty of the landscape of the AONB.

4.31 For a building to be considered redundant, it is important that the original use of the building for that purpose no longer exists. If the building is performing an essential function and the conversion will lead to a request that a replacement building be provided elsewhere, now or within the foreseeable future, then the conversion will not be covered by this policy. A subsequent application for a replacement building may well be refused.

4.32 There is a difference between a building of sound construction that has until recently been used and a derelict or semi-derelict structure that is now of sound construction, such as a temporary farm building or domestic outbuilding. The policy only allows for the conversion and adaption of sound permanent structures not the redevelopment of derelict buildings, which would be classed as new residential development in the countryside and assessed against Policy C1.

4.33 Though redundant, where a building makes an important contribution to the local character and appearance of an area, great care will need to be exercised in the design of the conversion. The perceived contribution the building makes to the rural character of the area will need to be retained. It cannot be presumed that simply by being redundant, that the building can be converted to residential use.

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4.34 Where, for example, a barn stands in an open field within the rural landscape, the conversion to residential use can raise the issue of curtilage. The existing field boundaries should not necessarily be taken as the curtilage for a proposed residential use. There is a need to define a curtilage appropriate to the building as the change of use from agricultural use to domestic garden has a profound visual impact on the immediate surroundings and potentially on the wider landscape, depending on the location of the site. The building should be capable of being converted and accommodated into the existing landscape, without significant effects on the rural character of the area, including light pollution and the character of rural highways. It is expected that any building works will be relatively minor and will involve the use of matching materials.

4.35 There are Permitted Development (PD) Rights allowing the conversion of some buildings to residential use from other uses including shops and agricultural use. Some of the current PD rights are intended to be temporary. The latest position should be checked prior to seeking planning permission.

4.36 Where Permitted Development Rights are being used, generally the Prior Notification procedure has to be followed. This essentially means notifying the Council of the intention to change the use and affording the Council the opportunity to request details of the schemes. It is advisable to seek professional advice or to contact the council to discuss the relevant rules and requirements prior to commencing any development on site.

Policy C 5

Housing related to Rural Workers

New dwellings in the countryside related to and located adjoining a rural enterprise will be permitted where:

- i. It is proven as essential to the continuing use of land and buildings for agriculture, forestry or a rural enterprise;
- ii. detailed evidence is submitted showing the relationship between the proposed housing and the existing or proposed rural enterprise and demonstrating why the housing is required for a full time worker in that location;
- iii. It is demonstrated that there are no suitable alternative dwellings available or that could be made available in the locality to meet the need. This includes those being used as tourist or temporary accommodation or existing buildings suitable for residential conversion. It must be shown why the housing need cannot be met by existing or proposed provision within existing settlement boundaries;
- iv. The financial viability of the business is demonstrated to justify temporary or permanent accommodation;
- v. The size, location and nature of the proposed dwelling is commensurate with the needs of the enterprise; and well related to existing farm buildings or associated dwellings;
- vi. The development has no adverse impact on the rural character and heritage assets of the area and its setting within the wider landscape. Where it affects the AONB the impact on its special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape will be the overriding consideration;
- vii. No dwelling serving or closely associated with the rural enterprise has recently been sold or changed from a residential use or otherwise separated from the holding within the last 10 years of the application for a new dwelling or converted from a residential use.

Where a new dwelling is essential to support a new rural enterprise, temporary accommodation will normally be sought for the first 3 years. Any permission will be subject to a condition restricting the use of the property to persons employed within the rural enterprise.

Agricultural occupancy conditions will be retained unless demonstrated there is no continuing need, that appropriate marketing has been undertaken and that it cannot meet an existing local housing need.

Supporting Text

4.37 The rural economy plays an important role in the District, in providing employment and in managing the rural landscape. The Council encourages viable agricultural, forestry and other rural enterprises that support the delivery of a wide range of public benefits and sees them as essential to the maintenance of a thriving rural economy.

4.38 The Council's preference for rural workers accommodation is for such provision to be located in nearby towns or villages or in existing properties near to their place of work, which would avoid the need for new dwellings in the countryside. The Council accepts however, that there may be cases where the nature and demands of the workers role require them to live at or very close to the work place. Such instances will be judged on the needs of the workplace and not the personal preferences of the specific individuals.

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4.39 Where new businesses are being set up, there is a need for the financial viability of the business to be demonstrated before a permanent dwelling is considered. A period of three years allows time for a business to establish and justify the development of a permanent dwelling to meet an essential need. A temporary dwelling to meet an essential need can be sought in this initial period.

4.40 The District is known for its links with the equestrian and racehorse industry, with Newbury Racecourse located on the edge of Newbury. The racehorse breeding and training industry is a particularly important part of the local rural economy, with the Lambourn area a nationally important location. This type of development is covered in Core Strategy Policy CS12. The Council wishes to retain and support the expansion of this industry and its related specialist breeding and veterinary facilities and in accordance with Policy CS12 will support the provision of new residential accommodation where it is shown to be essential.

4.41 Where new stabling or breeding facilities are proposed, together with residential accommodation, financial viability will need to be demonstrated together with supporting evidence to show the new facility has sufficient need to require a worker to be permanently living on the site in the long term. It should be noted that a restricted occupancy condition may be applied.

4.42 Many people work in rural areas in 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. Being employed in a rural location is not sufficient to qualify as a rural worker with an essential housing need.

4.43 The Council is mindful of the impact that proposed rural workers houses can have on the landscape and the potential impacts on biodiversity, particularly where the provision of housing involves the conversion of an existing building. The requirements within Core Strategy policies CS17 and CS19 will therefore apply.

4.44 Suitable alternative buildings that should be considered before creating a new dwelling unit, are existing vacant residential buildings or buildings suitable for conversion to residential use. Where an agricultural occupancy condition has been applied this will not be related unless it is clear that there is no longer a continuing need for the accommodation in the local area by the persons employed or last employed in the agricultural sector. Appropriate marketing will need to have been undertaken and it will need to be shown that the property cannot meet another local housing need.

4.45 The creation of new curtilages associated with new dwellings and their boundary treatment can also impact on the rural character of the area. Details will be required of the way the boundaries are to be established.

Policy C 6

Extension of Existing Dwellings within the Countryside

There is a presumption in favour of proposals for the extension of existing permanent dwellings. An extension or alteration will be permitted providing that:

- i. the scale of the enlargement is subservient to the original dwelling and is designed to be in character with the existing dwelling; and
- ii. it has no adverse impact on the setting, the space occupied within the plot boundary, on local rural character, the historic interest of the building and its setting within the wider landscape; and
- iii. the use of materials is appropriate within the local architectural context; and
- iv. there is no significant harm on the living conditions currently enjoyed by residents of neighbouring properties.

Supporting Text

4.46 Overall, there is a general policy of restraint in the countryside but it is recognised that there are many existing dwellings in the rural area and over time, proposals will come forward for extensions or alterations to these. The Council may permit these changes where it does not undermine the general policy of restraint or have an adverse impact on the rural character of the countryside. When considering proposals in or within the setting of the AONB, particular regard will be had to the impact on its natural beauty and special qualities.

4.47 The size and design of an extension or alteration is a key consideration of achieving sustainable development. The design of any development should be sympathetic to the existing dwelling, the area adjacent to the site and its wider setting. Proposed changes, either individually or cumulatively should not over dominate the existing dwelling.

4.48 The relationship with the existing dwelling is key. The scale, height and massing of an alteration or extension should appear subservient to the existing dwelling. There are no 'rules' that can be applied to an acceptable size of an extension as each application has to be considered on the basis of the impacts on the particular property in that location.

4.49 Regard will be given to previous extensions on the site, either allowed through Permitted Development Rights or through planning approvals. The original character of a house can be lost if the property is extended in an unsympathetic way through the addition of numerous extensions. The Council will take into account the original proportions of the building, prior to extensions being added. In some circumstances, it may be more appropriate to provide one new extension as a replacement for several existing extensions, especially where these are in poor condition or do not reflect the original character of the building.

4.50 Where successive alterations or extensions are proposed, including those permitted under Permitted Development Rights, the Council will have regard to the cumulative effect on the existing dwelling, the immediate setting and its wider surroundings. All applications will need to consider the impact of the cumulative extensions on the original dwelling as it was built or as it was on 1 July 1948.

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4.51 The enlargement of a small rural dwelling to become a substantial house can have a significant impact. An assessment will be needed of the impact of the development, individually and/or cumulatively, on the local architectural and visual context, and the capacity of the wider landscape to accommodate such development, especially within the AONB and its setting. The enlarged dwelling should be capable of being accommodated into the existing landscape, without undermining or having an adverse effect on the character of the area.

4.52 Extensions should be constructed in materials that harmonise with the character of the house being extended. An extension that may be considered of an acceptable size may still be refused, due to the use of unsuitable materials.

4.53 Care will be exercised to ensure that a proposed extension will not give rise to increased over-looking, loss of light, be of an overbearing nature or have a serious adverse impact on habitable rooms of adjacent or adjoining properties. For example, a two-storey extension sited to the rear of a terraced or semi-detached property requires careful design to ensure that the amenities of the neighbours are not seriously affected.

4.54 There are extensive Permitted Development Rights enabling the enlargement or alteration of a house without requiring a formal planning application. These rights come with standard conditions and both the rights and conditions may be changed through Government legislation. It is essential to establish what rights currently exist in the particular location. Rights may be removed or restricted by the Council in some exceptional circumstances and the presence of such a restriction must be checked prior to commencing any development thought to be permitted.

Policy C 7

Replacement of existing dwellings

There is a presumption in favour of the replacement of an existing dwelling of permanent construction. A replacement dwelling will be permitted providing that:

- i. the existing dwelling is not subject to a condition limiting the period of use as a dwelling; and
- ii. The replacement dwelling is proportionate in size and scale to the existing dwelling , uses appropriate materials and does not have an adverse impact on:
 1. The character and local distinctiveness of the rural area
 2. Individual heritage assets and their settings
 3. Its setting within the wider landscape; and
- iii. There is no extension of the existing curtilage, unless required to provide parking or amenity space to be consistent with dwellings in the immediate vicinity; and
- iv. Where the existing dwelling forms part of an agricultural, equestrian, or other commercial rural enterprise and is an essential part of that enterprise, the replacement dwelling must continue to perform the same function. An occupancy condition may be applied.
- v. The impact on any protected species is assessed and measures proposed to mitigate such impacts.

Supporting Text

4.55 Only proposals involving the replacement of existing permanent dwellings will be permitted under Policy C7. The policy should not be used to establish a permanent residential use on a site where a property is derelict.

4.56 There is evidence within the AONB of small rural properties being purchased, then demolished and replaced with substantial new houses that are alien to the local context and the special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape of the AONB. Such development neither enhances nor conserves the character of the AONB and will be resisted.

4.57 If a replacement dwelling is disproportionate it will not be acceptable. The key components of proportionality are the scale, massing, height and layout of a development. Similarly to the consideration of extensions to existing dwellings in the countryside, there are no rules that can be applied as to the acceptable size of a replacement dwelling. Any size increase has to be considered on the basis of the impact of a particular property in a particular location.

4.58 The replacement of dwellings will be assessed on the basis of the impact of the new development relative to the existing property on the character and local distinctiveness of the rural area. For a dwelling in the AONB and its setting, the prime consideration will be its impact on the special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape of the AONB.

4.59 Any replacement dwellings should be located on the footprint of the existing building unless alternative siting has a positive benefit on the impact on the countryside or other environmental benefits can be demonstrated.

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4.60 Intensification of development by adding an additional permanent dwelling will not be permitted on the site of an existing dwelling in the countryside, as this undermines the general restraint on building in the countryside.

Policy C 8

Extension of Residential Curtilages

Extensions to existing residential curtilages will only be permitted where it can be shown that there is no adverse impact on the character and local distinctiveness of the rural area, the setting of the property within the wider landscape or encroachment on the rural area, public footpaths and on the amenity of local residents. Proposals will be considered where:

- i. It is required to provide parking in the interests of highway safety; and
- ii. To realign a garden boundary or extend a garden to achieve a similar level of provision to other dwellings in the immediate area; and
- iii. Applications must be accompanied by details showing that:
 1. The boundary treatment of the extended curtilage is appropriate for the site and its rural surroundings.
 2. All new hard surfacing, ground moulding or landscaping are in character with the surrounding area.
 3. The forming of any new entrances or gateways, complete with visibility splays, do not result in the significant loss of landscape features or harm the character of the rural highway.

Supporting Text

4.61 There are many reasons why an individual might wish to extend the curtilage of their property. It could be to provide a larger garden, or provide off-street parking or garaging. Such changes even though minor in nature are not without potentially harmful effects. The inclusion of existing non-residential land used for agriculture, woodland or other rural uses can have a considerable visual impact on the local character of a rural area and the wider landscape, due to the urbanising effect of the change in use. Land previously used for agriculture or equestrian purposes has a different character to that of residential gardens and garage spaces.

4.62 The way the boundaries are treated has an impact. The erection of two metre high timber fences may be appropriate in an urban setting but, in a rural environment where many boundaries are marked out by simple post and rail fences or hedgerows, they can stand out in the landscape and would not be acceptable.

Delivery and Monitoring - Countryside Policies

The Housing in the Countryside Policies will be delivered through the development management process. Further information on delivery indicators is set out in Section 6 (Monitoring and Delivery) of this DPD. This will be reported in the Council's AMR.