

2.1. Part of a Corporate Purpose

2.1.1. Stroud District Council's overriding purpose is defined in its Business Plan 1999-2000 as:-

to make the Stroud District a better place to live and work for everyone.

2.1.2. The Council has developed a number of corporate aims to guide the Council's continuous development as an organisation, dedicated to serve the people living and working in the District. These are:-

- to ensure that high quality services are provided to meet public needs;
- to protect and improve the environment;
- to help build economic prosperity;
- to help those in particular need;
- to protect the community's health and safety; and
- to create and expand recreational and cultural opportunities.

2.1.3. The Council's Planning Service and this Local Plan make their contribution to achieving the Council's purpose, co-ordinated with other related services and programmes such as:-

- Housing Strategy.
- Economic Development Strategy.
- Dursley Regeneration Strategy.
- Stroud Regeneration Strategy.
- Tourism Strategy.
- Environment Strategy.
- Access Strategy.

2.2. Guiding Principles

Sustainability

2.2.1. The guiding principles of the Local Plan are formed from the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development has been defined as '*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' (the Brundtland Commission definition).

2.2.2. The Government simplifies this concept² as '*ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come*'. The planning system alone cannot achieve this concept. This requires action from us all, whether as individuals or as part of organisations. However, the Government recognises the key role that planning can play in

achieving a more sustainable pattern of development and in building sustainable communities. Planning

must consider the effects of development decisions on the environment not just in the short term but in the much longer term, and their wider impacts as well as their local ones.

Five Principles for Sustainable Development

2.2.3. In formulating and assessing proposals for the development of land and property there are five broad principles to take into account. If these are adhered to, that development will be as sustainable as possible.

A Comprehensive Approach: Address sustainability issues from the initial decision to undertake a project, through to the operations of the completed development.

Thinking Globally; Acting Locally: Recognise that decisions and actions taken locally have impacts far wider than local authority, regional and national boundaries. Individual actions translate cumulatively into global impacts.

Prevention is Better than Cure: The implications of certain actions for the environment are not always immediately clear or easy to determine. We have limited understanding of the extent the environment can tolerate human activity without suffering unacceptable damage. We need to apply a 'precautionary principle'. This principle simply states that it should be assumed an activity might be damaging to the environment unless it can be proved otherwise.

The Polluter Must Pay: The costs of preventing or cleaning up pollution and waste should be borne by those responsible for causing it, and not by society at large.

Partnership: No individual or organisation can solve environmental problems in isolation. All public bodies, businesses, community groups and individuals have a responsibility for conserving the environment. Close co-operation is essential.

Sustainability in Stroud District

2.2.4. The Local Plan must take into account economic, environmental and social factors in providing a framework for decision taking on land-use issues. Allying these to the concept and principles of sustainability the Local Plan can play their part in working towards a sustainable society in a number of ways:-

² See "Opportunities for Change" - a consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development, 1998

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOST - NOVEMBER 1999

2. STRATEGY

- Influencing the location of new development in order to reduce the need to travel and make provision for an integrated transport network.
- Supporting and encouraging the growth of the local economy to provide job opportunities.
- Helping to make provision for homes for all - reducing social exclusion.
- Making the best use of existing urban land and property - the re-use of 'brownfield sites'.
- Looking at accommodating new means of producing energy - especially from renewable resources.
- Planning for new development that takes account of energy conservation in terms of site layouts, building design, provision for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport where appropriate.
- Protecting the environment giving particular priority to those natural and man-made resources which are finite.

2.2.5. However, it must be recognised that there will be inherent conflict between some of these. There will be times when the need to make provision for development will not fit easily with the desire to protect the environment. This Plan provides the framework for decisions that will strike a balance between the two issues, with the concept of sustainability underpinning its approach.

2.2.6. The Local Plan only plays a part in this process of achieving sustainable development.

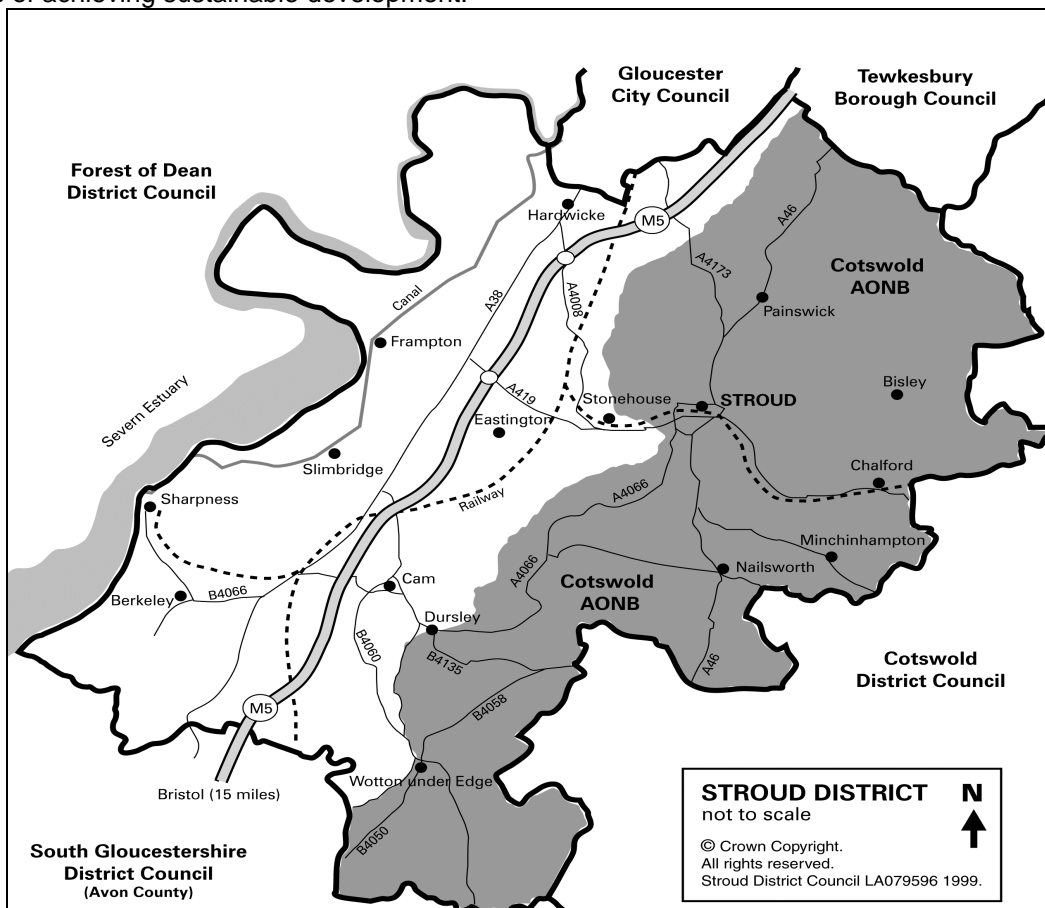
Strategies and actions are needed at all levels - from Government policy down to individual actions - to pull in the same direction if the concept is in any way to be achieved. The provisions of the Local Plan will not in themselves achieve a sustainable society, but they will play their part in working towards it.

2.3. The Existing Situation

2.3.1. For the purpose of the Local Plan, it is important to recognise that in working towards sustainability, the existing environment and land use patterns have a large influence on how people behave. This section therefore outlines the features of the District in general terms. Individual chapters will describe the local situation in more detail relating to the topic covered.

2.3.2. Location

Stroud District, (see map), covers an area of about 175 square miles in the south of Gloucestershire. Its western boundary is formed by the Severn Estuary beyond which lies the Forest of Dean District. To the north lies Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough Councils whilst Cotswold District Council is the adjoining local authority to the east. South of the District lies South Gloucestershire District, a unitary authority bordering Bristol which is some 15 miles south of Stroud's southern boundary.



Population/Built Environment

2.3.3. The District is predominantly rural in character. Its population was 108,600 in mid 1997, with the settlements of the Stroud Valleys and those of Cam, Dursley and Wotton-Under-Edge containing about three-quarters of that total. Appendix 2 contains a map indicating the parishes of the District and their mid 1997 populations.

2.3.4. Stroud (town), is the main commercial and shopping centre serving the District. It competes with Cirencester and Tewkesbury as the most important town in the County for industrial/commercial/retail activity after Gloucester and Cheltenham. Dursley and Cam provide the main focus for industrial, commercial and shopping activities in the southern part of the District.

2.3.5. The towns of Painswick, Minchinhampton, Nailsworth, Stonehouse, Wotton-under-Edge and Berkeley provide facilities and services for wider local needs, whilst a number of villages provide a range of local facilities or services to cater for community needs. Beyond these there are a large number of hamlets and individual properties that rely on the larger towns and villages for facilities and services.

2.3.6. Stroud District is fortunate in having a high quality of built environment. This is founded upon the local distinctiveness of the Cotswold and Severn Vale buildings, particularly the rich architectural heritage of these areas. The District contains nearly 5,000 buildings listed as being of architectural or historic interest. In addition, there are 42 designated conservation areas throughout the District.

Economy

2.3.7. The Stroud economy shares many of the key features of the wider area of Gloucestershire. It has a healthy, diverse and strong economic base. The manufacturing sector remains the backbone of the economy, well supported by the public administration, distribution, hotels and banking and finance sectors. These sectors account for over 80% of employment in the District. Gloucestershire is forecast to have the fifth fastest growth in gross domestic product of any UK county up to 2010. Employment in the service sector is expected to be the fastest growing area, and the high proportion of self employed is expected to continue to increase. Stroud is well placed to benefit from these trends as new patterns of working continue to emerge.

Table 2.1: Population in Employment by Sector 1995³

Sector	Percentage
Manufacturing	33
Public admin	24
Distribution / hotels	22
Banking / finance	10
Other services	3
Transport / communications	4
Construction	4

2.3.8. Stroud has a well skilled workforce of some 49,000 people. The unemployment rate remains below the national average, standing at 2.4% at November 1998 against the national average of 4.4%.

2.3.9. The Stroud Valleys are the 'engine room' of the District's economy. The majority of the District's main manufacturing and service sector businesses are located in the Valleys. There is also a strong industrial presence in the south of the District with major employers at Dursley, Wotton-Under-Edge and Berkeley.

2.3.10. However, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bristol are significant influences on the District. Being major employment bases they attract commuters from the area. Whilst the District does import some employees it is a net exporter of around 12,300 workers⁴ to surrounding administrative areas.

2.3.11. These cities have also had a significant impact on Stroud's retail and leisure industries. Major development in and adjacent to these cities draws shoppers and those seeking commercial entertainment from the area. This has contributed to the decline of the town centres of Stroud and Dursley with the loss of shopping and leisure facilities.

2.3.12. Tourism has an important role in the local economy. About 8% of employment in the District is sustained in full or part by tourism. It generates over £41million spending within the District. The Council recognises the part that tourism can play in economic development within the District. Where possible it will support and enable tourism projects that provide positive economic benefits without unacceptable damage to the environment or the community.

2.3.13. Despite the overall healthy nature of the Stroud economy there are pockets of social deprivation. Symptoms of exclusion and

³ Gloucestershire Labour Market Information Unit (GLMIU).

⁴ Source: Census 1991.

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

2. STRATEGY

underlying decline are apparent in electoral wards in Stroud, Cam and Dursley. A successful Single Regeneration Bid⁵ in 1998 addresses some of the issues. However, provision of new employment opportunities close to these areas would also help to alleviate some of the problems.

Natural Environment

2.3.14. The eastern half of the District is part of the Cotswold Hills, which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). To the west of the Cotswolds escarpment there are superb views stretching across the low-lying landscape of the Severn Vale. In addition to the AONB, other more locally important landscapes have been identified in the District. Twelve landscape character areas and their important features were identified in a landscape assessment of the District undertaken in 1996.

2.3.15. The wildlife, flora and fauna of the District are also highly valued. The Severn Estuary and much of the foreshore in the District is a protected wildlife habitat under the RAMSAR Convention in addition to its designation as a Special Protection Area, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a proposed Special Area for Conservation.

2.3.16. Land covering over 2,800 hectares is designated as either Site of Special Scientific Interest or National Nature Reserve. These areas, protected for their nature conservation value, cover a wide range of habitat types from beech woodlands to natural limestone grasslands. Some of them form part of the extensive commons which also serve as a valuable asset for informal recreation.

2.3.17. Water plays an important role in the natural environment. With the Severn Estuary to the west, the District contains around 42 kilometres of coastline and is accessible to the open sea via Sharpness Docks. The Vale formed by the River Severn is very low lying and there are extensive areas susceptible to flooding. The catchment of the Severn includes the Rivers Frome, Cam and Little Avon within the District. These rivers, and their tributaries, flowing down from the Cotswolds escarpment provide an abundance of rich natural habitats and impressive landscape features.

Transport

2.3.18. The District is accessible by a wide range of transport modes, which are either well established or have the potential to be improved.

Road: The M5 motorway runs the length of the District with junctions south of Gloucester, west of Stonehouse and just across the southern District boundary in South Gloucestershire District. Major roads (A46, A38, A419, A4135 and A4173) provide links to the M5 and the M4. Therefore, within half an hour drive of the District's borders, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Bristol, Swindon, Bath, Cirencester, Yate and Tewkesbury can all be reached.

Rail: There are rail connections with the Midlands, South Wales and the South-West via Gloucester and Bristol, and with London and the South-East via Swindon from the Stroud, Stonehouse and Cam and Dursley Stations.

Sea: The District also contains the location of the country's most inland seaport - at Sharpness on the Severn Estuary. The Docks are less than 15 kilometres (9 miles) from junctions 13 and 14 of the M5. They provide cargo handling facilities for ships up to 5,000dwt.

Air: Bristol Airport, south of the District, and Birmingham Airport to the north provide the nearest scheduled and charter air services. The closest local airport is at Staverton, mid-way between Gloucester and Cheltenham.

Canal: The Sharpness-Gloucester Canal links the operational part of Sharpness to Gloucester. Although there is no regular trade along the canal since the closure of Gloucester Docks, the canal retains the potential for such commercial traffic.

2.4. Forecast Levels of Growth

2.4.1. The Gloucestershire County Structure Plan has indicated that a substantial level of growth is anticipated in the need for new dwellings in the County over the Plan period to 2011. About 50,000 new dwellings will be required, County-wide, to meet the demand from:-

- natural increase in the existing population;
- immigration from other areas to the County; and
- the continuing decline in household size brought about by factors such as:-
 - ◆ people living longer and staying in their homes longer, thus slowing down the recycling of property;
 - ◆ young people moving away from the family home earlier than they used to;
 - ◆ married people getting separated or divorced and thus requiring separate units of accommodation; and
 - ◆ more people preferring to live alone.

2.4.2. In distributing this growth through its strategic policy, the County Council has allocated

⁵ 'Regeneration of Gloucestershire's Market Towns: Better Communities' - SRB Challenge Fund Bid led by Gloucestershire County Council.

about 9,400 dwellings to Stroud District. However, as the Plan period started in 1991, some of these have already been built and others have been committed through new planning permissions given since 1 July 1991. An allowance is also made for windfall development (i.e. that which cannot otherwise be predicted). Taking account of these factors, the balance for the District is about 3,300 dwellings for which land must be provided for in the Local Plan policies and proposals.

2.4.3. The Structure Plan also makes forecasts of the likely growth in the number of people requiring jobs during the Plan period. For the County this is 28,650 jobs, with Stroud's share being 6,700 jobs. These figures are translated into a requirement for land that will accommodate new employment generating development. This is allied with policy considerations that aim to promote the economic health of the County and to direct growth in a sustainable way. Taking these factors into account, a requirement for 532 hectares of land for employment purposes is identified in the County. The distribution of this in the Structure Plan gives Stroud District's share as about 100 hectares of land.

2.5 Purpose and Aims of the Local Plan

2.5.1. Planning policy can create or assist change towards a more sustainable society. In formulating the Local Plan, the concept of sustainability, an examination of the current situation of the District in land-use terms and the forecast levels of housing and employment growth have all been taken into consideration. The main purpose of the Local Plan in influencing change is:-

To establish a framework of planning policy that will provide opportunities for maintaining and improving the overall physical, economic and social well-being of Stroud District whilst protecting the highly valued environment in which people live and work.

2.5.2. In establishing this framework there are a number of aims that provide a starting point for more specific objectives, policies and site proposals through which the Local Plan purpose will be achieved. These are:-

- To enable the economic prosperity of the District by increasing the choice and diversity of employment opportunities within Stroud District.
- To accommodate the anticipated levels of growth of development in a sustainable way.
- To provide for affordable housing needs across the District.

- To make full and effective use of existing infrastructure and community facilities and services.
- To make full and effective use of land that has previously been developed.
- To meet community needs and priorities for infrastructure, services and facilities.
- To reinforce the role of the District's towns and key villages by enhancing their vitality and viability.
- To protect and enhance the character of the District's natural and built environment.
- To contribute to the efficient use of energy both in new development and transport use by providing increased opportunities to reduce the need to travel.
- To improve the social and cultural opportunities for the community.
- To ensure the high quality of design in development proposals.

2.6. The Strategy

2.6.1. The strategy of the Local Plan has a number of elements to it. These are outlined in the following paragraphs. They take account of preceding sections on the place of the Local Plan in the national, regional, strategic and corporate settings, the principles of sustainability, the existing situation and the forecast levels of growth for the District. From this background, the purpose and guiding principles of the Plan have been established. The strategy now expands upon that framework and provides the basis for the more detailed policies and proposals to be found under topic chapters.

2.6.2. The approach taken to **accommodating new development** is to locate this in or adjacent to existing settlements. In doing this a **clear priority is given to directing the greater part of growth towards the central Severn Vale, the Stroud urban area and the principal settlements of Cam and Dursley.** Smaller allocations have been made in a number of other settlements which have a range of facilities and act as focal points for their rural hinterland. Table 2.2 below demonstrates how the Structure Plan requirement to accommodate about 9,400 dwellings in the District up to 2011 is focused in this way. The greater part of the requirement is located south of the Gloucester urban area⁶, the main settlements in the Stroud Valleys that comprise the Stroud 'urban area'⁶ and at Dursley and Cam, as the 'principal settlements'⁶ serving the southern part of the District.

⁶ The terms 'urban area' and 'principal settlements' are drawn from the Gloucestershire Structure Plan to be the main focus for new development.

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

2. STRATEGY

Table 2.2: Distribution of about 9,400 Dwellings to 2011

	CENTRAL SEVERN VALE	STROUD VALLEYS	DURSLEY AND CAM	REST OF DISTRICT
Completions (3,050)	48	1,740	301	958
% of total completions	2%	57%	10%	31%
Commitments (1,795)	313	1,042	133	305
% of total commitments	17%	58%	7%	17%
Allocations (3,390)	2,050	505	550	285
% of total allocations	61%	15%	16%	8%
TOTAL (8,090)*	2,413	3,164	990	1,524
% OF TOTAL	30%	39%	12%	19%

Note:

Completions = mid-1991 to 31/12/98.

Commitments = to 31/12/98.

Allocations = allocations in this Plan.

* Difference in total to Structure Plan figure is due to windfall allocation.

2.6.3. However, village services and facilities have declined over recent years and there is poor availability of affordable housing in the rural areas. These facts result from changes in lifestyles and social trends, much of which is outside the control of the planning system. Such problems are accentuated in those villages where there has been little growth. The continuing decline in average household size means fewer customers for services and facilities in those villages. The problem is compounded by small properties having been extended and upgraded, and new housing in villages comprising mainly the large, detached variety. Consequently, there have been few new small sized houses to replace the smaller stock lost.

2.6.4. Therefore, in order to build upon existing infrastructure, to help arrest the decline of services and facilities in villages serving a wider area, to provide opportunities for affordable housing and to help build thriving village communities **allowance has been made for limited growth in villages** in the District able to provide services to a wider, though local, catchment area. These are Painswick, Minchinhampton, Sharpness, Eastington, Kings Stanley, Kingswood, Leonard Stanley and Whitminster. In smaller villages with provision of only basic community facilities and services, the prospect of growth is retained through the possibility of windfall provision on infill plots and through affordable housing provision on 'exception' sites.

2.6.5. The Gloucestershire County Structure Plan identifies a requirement about 100 hectares of land for employment purposes in the District. Around half of that already exists as commitments through

planning consents and allocations previously made in the Stroud District Local Plan, Deposit Version 1994. This Plan makes provision for the remainder through the **allocation of employment sites to meet the requirements of expanding indigenous businesses, start-up enterprises and new industry** attracted to the District.

2.6.6. The allocated sites are well related to the main settlements, providing the opportunity for people to live and work in close proximity without the need for long car borne journeys. A variety of sites are allocated to provide a choice and diversity in scale and nature of land that is essential to promote the health of the local economy.

2.6.7. In addition to meeting the Structure Plan requirement, this Plan seeks to protect and improve existing employment sites. The economic base of the District lies within the Stroud Valleys, at Cam and Dursley and with outlying major employers near Wotton-under-Edge (Renishaw) and Berkeley (Magnox BNFL). There is a need to increase the job opportunities in these areas to counter the adverse effects of journey to work out-commuting from the District which exceeds in-commuting and to increase opportunities for people to live close to their workplace.

2.6.8. This Plan strikes a **balance between accommodating new development and the protection of the environment**. With an undeniably high quality rural and built environment lying between the cities of Bristol and Gloucester and Cheltenham, Stroud District experiences intense development pressures. The Cotswold escarpment wraps around the main built-up areas of the Stroud Valleys and around Cam and Dursley, limiting the potential expansion of the settlements by virtue of the Cotswolds protected landscape status and the topography. With half the District covered by AONB and the rest highly visible from the escarpment, all the smaller settlements are susceptible to adverse effects of development on their character and their settings.

2.6.9. This presents a particular dilemma since it is the locations within and adjacent to the main settlements that provide the most sustainable options for development, particularly in their potential to reduce car travel and maximise the use of alternative modes of transport. In addition, some villages still need to grow as identified in paragraph 2.6.4.

2.6.10. The strategy employed accepts that there is a need to build within and adjacent to the main towns and villages, but to do so in a manner which minimises the adverse effects. Smaller developments can be absorbed more readily into existing settlements. Therefore, development

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

2. STRATEGY

allocations are contained within a larger number of smaller sites (i.e. small relative to the scale of the settlements involved). As far as possible these lie on 'brownfield' sites and within settlements. However the scope for such development is very limited. It is inevitable that sites for the scale of development required have to be outside the limits of previous development boundaries and also that some land relating to villages in the AONB will be used.

2.6.11. Beyond the use of a very small amount of land within the AONB, no other land with an environmentally protected status is proposed for development. To move towards a sustainable pattern of development that balances all the aspects of the 'sustainability' concept, this is a small compromise. The majority of the AONB will remain unaffected by development.

2.6.12. A further element of the Local Plan strategy will **provide long-term protection for individual features and the broad character of the countryside**, allowing development only where it is essential to have a location in the countryside location. Large areas of the District are covered by a variety of designations protecting their special natural features and assets (elements of environmental capital). These cover special landscapes, wildlife habitats, archaeological sites, flood risk, water resources and the best agricultural land. These designations will continue to be enforced rigorously in the control of development.

2.6.13. In addition to the protection of particular areas of land for their environmental capital, it is Government policy that the open countryside should be protected for its own sake. It is important to avoid piecemeal development in the countryside in order to retain its broad character and appearance and to prevent the damaging impacts of a substantial increase in the need to travel. In respect of the character of the countryside in Stroud, a study has been undertaken and the findings form the basis of protective policy covering this issue. The study - Stroud District - Landscape Assessment - is available as supplementary planning guidance.

2.6.14. The main town centres of Stroud and Dursley have suffered gradual decline in their vitality and viability over a number of years. It is important that the Local Plan addresses the issue of **regeneration of Stroud and Dursley**. A considerable amount of background work has been undertaken by the District Council and comprehensive regeneration strategies have already been formulated. From these the land-use elements are presented as policies and proposals that will assist in the process of revitalising the towns and improving their economic viability.

2.6.15. It is a vital component of the regeneration strategies that the catchment populations are increased in these towns. This may be achieved by policies that encourage higher residential densities and the re-use of previously developed land and property, (often referred to as 'brownfield' sites), for residential use within the towns and by the allocation of suitable sites for dwellings within reasonable travel distance, preferably on foot, by cycling or by public transport, of the centres. These measures will provide a bigger potential market within the shortest possible travel distance of these centres. This will assist in meeting the sustainability objectives of the Plan while contributing to the regeneration of the towns.

2.6.16. Other proposals will seek to promote specific sites in the centres for development, especially for mixed uses incorporating residential, leisure and commercial uses. Such developments will bring new attractions to the towns and again aid the regeneration processes.

2.6.17. Underlying the key issues of settlement and employment locations, regeneration of Stroud and Dursley, the health of rural areas and the protection of the environment is the **most efficient and effective use and provision of services and facilities**. This is an important aspect of creating a sustainable pattern of development. The Plan provides a framework within which infrastructure and service providers can formulate or adjust their own investment plans in order to meet the needs of the future population of the District.

2.6.18. Too often in the past this type of investment has followed rather than preceded development. Where development takes place, it is important that the provision of new, or improvements to existing, facilities and services is made in step with the development. Developers may be expected to contribute towards the cost of provision of infrastructure. The opportunity will be taken to negotiate such contributions through the process of considering planning applications. Where they can be identified in advance, such considerations are highlighted in relevant proposals in this Plan.

2.6.19. It is an integral part of the strategy that **all development proposals will need to demonstrate a high quality of design**. This is important in all aspects - from the design and layout of individual buildings to the layout and the provision of associated facilities such as roads and open space. Well designed developments will complement existing sensitive environments and may create new dynamic environments in areas of poor character or lacking distinctive character.

Beyond traditional issues of density and overall layout, form, scale, height, massing detailing,

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

2. STRATEGY

materials, important design aspects relating to sustainability in its broadest sense will be energy conservation, crime prevention, accessibility for all people and reducing people's need to travel. Good design can improve environmental quality, attract new business and investment, promote sustainable development, reinforce civic pride and a sense of place. In short, it can make a positive contribution to the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors to the District.

2.6.21. The final element of the strategy is to ensure that the **community is provided with the cultural and leisure facilities to serve its needs.** Such facilities range across the provision of space and buildings for sport, art, entertainment and passive recreation. These are valuable amenities that can contribute to the overall appearance of the environment, providing focal points for public use and enhancing our health and quality of life.