

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. Stroud District possesses a natural environment of very diverse character and high quality. Extensive areas and a large number of sites are covered by designations related to their special attributes.

8.1.2. In terms of wildlife habitat, the Severn Estuary is internationally recognised under the RAMSAR Convention and is a Special Protection Area site. It is also currently a candidate Special Area for Conservation site. The District also contains National Nature Reserves and 29 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. In addition, there are many locally recognised sites of nature conservation and geological importance.

8.1.3. The landscape of the District is also regarded as special. Nearly half the District lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Cotswold scarp overlooks the distinctive Severn Vale and the estuarine landscape of the River Severn. Within the Vale high quality and historic landscapes have been identified for protection. In general, there is a wealth of features that make up the landscape character and these have been identified in the supplementary planning guidance: Landscape Assessment, that accompanies this Local Plan.

8.1.4. Such designations reflect not only the visual quality of the District's landscape and settlements, but also its nature conservation importance and its rich and diverse heritage. In addition, the vast majority of the District's landscape that is not specially designated is of very high quality, and also deserving of special care when considering proposals which would impact on that quality.

8.2. Objectives

1. To protect the quality, extent and variety of natural habitats and features within the District.
2. To provide a balance between the need for new development, and the desire to protect the District's natural heritage, and preserve the amenities of its residents.
3. To ensure that new development reflects and respects the high quality landscape of the whole of the District.
4. To protect the best and most versatile agricultural land, and to provide for the needs of agriculture, where this does not involve unacceptable environmental impact.

8.3. Central Government Advice

8.3.1. Government guidance for the natural environment is found in a variety of sources. PPG7:

The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development 1997 provides advice on the need to balance economic, conservation and agricultural and other factors in considering development in the countryside.

8.3.2. PPG9: Nature Conservation 1994 advises on planning and nature conservation, both in designated sites and in undesignated areas, encouraging local authorities to make adequate provision for development and economic growth whilst ensuring effective conservation of wildlife and natural features.

8.3.3. Government guidance is also supplemented by publications produced by organisations such as the Countryside Agency and English Nature which provide advice on more detailed issues relating to the Natural Environment.

8.4. Gloucestershire County Structure Plan

8.4.1. The Structure Plan aims to consider Gloucestershire's natural and historic environment as a whole, adopting an holistic approach that recognises the need to conserve and enhance the wider 'undesignated' environment. It advocates a shift away from the protection of individual designated elements of the environment to one which reflects the distinction between critical and constant environmental assets. The Plan also seeks to address the problems of environmental deterioration experienced by people in their everyday lives.

8.4.2. The South West Regional Planning Conference in partnership with non-Governmental Wildlife Organisations have published 'Action for Biodiversity in the South West'. This presents a strategy for the delivery of national biodiversity action plan targets at a regional level and a series of action plans for species and habitats of particular importance to the region.

8.5. Nature Conservation

8.5.1. There has been a growing awareness and understanding of the importance of nature conservation at many levels. On an international scale, the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 resulted in greater awareness of the natural environment and its vulnerability. It led to the signing of the 'Treaty on Biodiversity of Species' - an agreement between countries about how to protect the diversity of species and habitats in the world.

8.5.2. At a national level, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provided for the protection of species and habitats considered rare or vulnerable in

the United Kingdom. More recently, the UK's commitment to the Convention of Biological Diversity has resulted in the production of both national and regional biodiversity strategies. In 1994, the UK government published 'Biodiversity - The UK Action Plan' as part of its response to Agenda 21 which it signed up to at the Earth Summit.

8.5.3. Work is currently being undertaken on a County-wide Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which involves a partnership of organisations comprising the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, English Nature, RSPB, Local Authorities and other interested parties and individuals. The main aim of the Gloucestershire BAP is to conserve and enhance species and habitats which characterise the various areas of Gloucestershire. More specifically, the information contained in the Gloucestershire BAP will provide the Local Planning Authority with the key biodiversity issues relevant to particular areas of Stroud District. This information will be taken into account by the Local Planning Authority in accordance with paragraph 24 of PPG9. The Gloucestershire BAP also aims to be a proactive initiative and, as such, will identify priority areas for action with corresponding targets for species and habitat enhancement. Through the planning process, Stroud District Council will aim to contribute towards the achievement of these biodiversity targets and the overall objective of sustainable development.

8.5.4. At local level, the provisions of statutory guidance for the natural environment are manifested in a series of protective designations. The Severn Estuary is designated as an internationally important wetland under the **RAMSAR** Convention and as a **Special Protection Area (SPA)** under the European Union's Birds Directive. **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** are intended to protect habitats of threatened species of wildlife and, together with SPAs, comprise the European Union's 'Natura 2000' network of habitats of pan-European nature conservation importance. The Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods have been designated as **National Nature Reserves (NNR)** which are sites of national and international importance for nature conservation. In addition, there are a number of other **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** within the District designated for their geological, botanical or zoological importance at a national level.

8.5.5. Other, local, designations include **Key Wildlife Sites and Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)**. Key Wildlife Sites are designated by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust as wildlife habitats of County importance. Like SSSIs they are mostly semi-natural habitats which if destroyed, could not be re-created. RIGS are the geological equivalent of Key Wildlife

Sites and are geological sites considered worthy of protection for their educational, research, historical or aesthetic importance.

8.5.6. Nature conservation issues, including the protection, enhancement and provision of wildlife habitats, can be material considerations in the determination of planning applications. The impact of development on natural features and wildlife, however, can be minimised through the careful control of that development. Conditions will therefore be imposed on planning permissions, and appropriate Legal Agreements sought, if necessary, when wildlife or other nature conservation issues are material to the determination of a planning application.

8.5.7. It is recognised that there may be development proposals in which the benefits to the public outweigh any adverse effect upon the nature conservation interest of the site. In these instances, it is the District Council's intention to minimise harm to the nature conservation interest and ensure that compensatory measures such as habitat creation or enhancement are included. The District Council will have to be satisfied that the harm to the nature conservation interest is not such that it cannot be replaced or compensated for adequately.

8.6. International And National Designations

8.6.1. International designations of a site of nature conservation importance offer the highest level of protection to that site. SSSIs are areas or features where conservation is considered essential to maintain and enhance the scientific interest and nature conservation of the site, and can include NNRs, SPA, SAC and RAMSAR sites. Such designated sites within the Plan area are identified on the Proposals Map and listed in Appendix 6.

8.6.2. Procedures for determining proposals affecting such sites are set out in PPG9: Nature Conservation. These include provision for call-in by the Secretary of State and consultation with English Nature and the European Union. Environmental Assessment Regulations may also apply.

8.6.3. Where the development of such sites is justified, the Council will expect schemes to be agreed in order to minimise the impact upon features of nature conservation interest. Where appropriate, such features and individual elements should be retained within the site and opportunities for the creation of new habitats explored.

8.6.4. The use of planning conditions and obligations may make development acceptable and will serve to secure long-term management or

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

8. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

provide nature conservation features and create new habitats to compensate for any losses.

8.6.5. The following policies refer to existing designated sites and any designations made during the plan period.

POLICY N1

Development proposals on or affecting any designated or candidate Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR), RAMSAR, Special Protection Area (SPA) or Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as indicated on the Proposals Map and in Appendix 6, will not be permitted unless either:

1. it can be demonstrated that there will be no loss or damage to their nature conservation value; or
2. the development can be controlled through the use of appropriate conditions or planning obligations to prevent damaging impacts on wildlife habitats or important physical features.

Local Designations

8.6.6. Whilst a number of sites in the District are not statutorily defined as being of value in nature conservation terms, they are of special local nature conservation interest and it is important to afford protection to them. Of particular note are the **County Key Wildlife Sites**, identified by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and adopted by the District Council as sites requiring protection. These include many ancient woodlands and unimproved limestone grasslands that are present in the district and have specialised wildlife communities. **Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)** are also important local designations. All County Key Wildlife Sites and RIGS within Stroud District are outlined in Appendix 6 and are identified on the Proposals Map. Lists are regularly updated and potential developers are advised to contact the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust or the District Council for up-to-date information.

8.6.7. Local Authorities have powers under the National Parks And Access To The Countryside Act 1949 to designate a habitat of local significance as a **Local Nature Reserve** to help conserve the natural surroundings. Such sites are owned, leased or managed under agreement by Local Authorities and can make a significant contribution to nature conservation and also provide opportunities for people to see, learn about and enjoy wildlife. At

present there are no Local Nature Reserves within Stroud District, but where proposed designations can be justified, the District Council will support the designation and management of sites. Developers are therefore advised to contact the District Council for up-to-date information on the designation of Local Nature Reserves.

POLICY N2

Development within or affecting Key Wildlife Sites, Regionally Important Geological or Geomorphological Sites or Local Nature Reserves will not be permitted unless either:

1. there is no adverse effect upon the nature conservation interest; or
2. compensatory measures of habitat creation (involving similar quality and quantity to that lost) are provided elsewhere in or adjoining the identified site where appropriate.

Protected Species

8.6.8. The protection of designated sites, such as SSSIs, NNRs and Key Wildlife Sites is one of the main ways of protecting rare plants and animals. However, a considerable number of plant and animal species are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, wherever they exist. This legislation makes it an offence to kill, injure, take, or intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct any protected species and their place of shelter. The presence of a protected species is a material consideration in determining a planning application for development. Where protected species are known or suspected to exist on a site subject to a planning application, English Nature or the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust will be consulted to ensure that the species are taken into account.

8.6.9. The District Council may subsequently require the applicant to undertake a survey to identify the types of protected species present, their population levels and the location and nature of their habitats. The applicant will also be expected to supply information detailing how the development proposal will affect the protected species and what measures will be undertaken to mitigate the impact of the development on the species. Where it is found that a proposed development could not avoid or minimise disturbance to a protected species, planning permission will be refused. Where a development proposals is permitted, the District Council will consider the use of conditions or planning obligations to ensure the protection and

enhancement of the species or habitat, as appropriate.

POLICY N3

Development proposals which would adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, any legally protected plant or animal or its habitat will not be permitted unless conditions can be attached requiring the provision of safeguarding measures to secure their protection.

Wildlife Corridors

8.6.10. One of the main objectives of the Gloucestershire Biodiversity Action Plan is to maintain the vitality and diversity of plant and animal species by encouraging the recolonisation of key habitats. Wildlife corridors can play an important role in the achievement of this objective since they can contribute to the process of species migration by linking one habitat to another. Wildlife corridors can take many forms, including agricultural and railway land, river and canal banks, hedgerows, allotments and other green open space. They act as a source and a means for the dispersal of habitats and species into new areas by providing an ecological network. Unfortunately, parts of this ecological network have become eroded and connections between habitats are incomplete. One of the main reasons for the fragmentation of habitats involves inappropriate development along wildlife corridors, especially within urban and suburban areas. Where habitats become isolated and the migration of species is prevented, opportunities for species recolonisation to wider areas can be threatened. In the most serious cases, fragmentation of habitats may result in species extinction. The potential for wildlife corridors, in both urban and rural areas, to create habitats for plant and animal species in the future can often be overlooked when considering development proposals. Areas of land which, at the time when a planning application is submitted, do not host a diverse range of plants and animals can, potentially, offer an important habitat for a particular species in the future. The District Council will therefore seek to protect wildlife corridors from development where it would have a detrimental effect upon the migration of plant and animal species and the continuity of wildlife habitats.

Natural Features

8.6.11. Considerable importance is placed upon the natural features in the District in relation to both their nature conservation value and to the contribution they make to the local landscape. The Council will seek to conserve these features in a positive manner.

8.6.12. The impact of development on natural features and wildlife can be minimised through careful control of that development. Conditions will continue to be attached to planning permissions to achieve protection of retained features and, where appropriate, developers will be required to produce a protection scheme to ensure that retained features are adequately protected during construction work. The introduction of complementary landscape features will be sought where appropriate in association with development proposals.

POLICY N4

In considering development proposals, the retention and management of important natural features such as trees, hedges, shrubs, vegetation, ponds, water meadows, green lanes, walls, woodland and unimproved pasture will be required where appropriate. The impact of development on such features should be minimised.

Water Features

8.6.13. Water features are not only used for recreation and as sources of water supply, but can also provide significant national and local conservation interest by being important wildlife habitats, and can make a valuable contribution to the landscape.

8.6.14. The District has substantial water resources in the Rivers Severn and Frome, their tributaries and other smaller rivers and streams in the District, together with parts of the Stroudwater and Thames and Severn Canals. Whilst the River Severn is the subject of various national statutory protection designations, the smaller rivers and their tributaries provide local nature conservation interest, but generally have no statutory designations. Similarly, other water features such as ponds and canals provide valuable habitats but do not enjoy specific statutory protection. The importance of management of water features and their associated vegetation is therefore recognised by the District Council and development which would have an adverse effect upon water features will be carefully controlled.

POLICY N5

Development affecting natural watercourses, canals, ponds and other water features will not be permitted unless either:

- 1. there is no adverse effect upon the nature conservation interest of the water feature; or**
- 2. the development can be controlled through**

the use of appropriate conditions or planning obligations to prevent damaging impacts on water features.

8.7. Landscape

8.7.1. The landscape of Stroud District is a rich and diverse asset, the character of which directly affects the quality of life. A large proportion of the District falls within the Cotswolds AONB a nationally important landscape which was designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing its natural beauty. Special Landscape Areas are referred to in the Gloucestershire County Structure Plan: Second Review as areas recognised as being of County-level landscape importance. Primarily bordering the AONB, their aim is to protect the landscape setting of the AONB.

8.7.2. The value of the landscape across the whole District lies in its diversity of character and appearance. Natural and man-made features combined with the topography of the District contribute significantly to the attractiveness of the landscape. It is considered desirable, wherever possible, to retain and encourage the management of important natural features, in relation to both their nature conservation value and the contribution they make to the local landscape.

The Cotswolds Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty

8.7.3. Approximately 50% of Stroud District lies within the Cotswolds AONB. The Cotswolds AONB landscape has a diverse visual character ranging from the dramatic edge landscape of the main escarpment face, through the incised and the valley and ridge landscapes west of the scarp to the gentle and open landscape of the dip slope. Man's impact on the landscape in the form of architectural features, historic buildings the patterns of land use and farming are also inseparable elements of the landscape character of the area.

8.7.4. The Cotswolds AONB Partnership has been set up and comprises the County and District Councils within the designated area, and other interested parties. It provides an advisory role on planning policy matters and is actively involved in direct countryside management work. The Partnership will implement the AONB Management Strategy for the Cotswolds that was approved in 1996.

8.7.5. MAFF has also designated that part of the Cotswold AONB which lies within Stroud District as part of its Cotswold Hills Environmentally Sensitive

Area (ESA). ESAs are areas of land where farming practices have helped to create or protect distinctive landscapes, wildlife habitats or historic features. The purpose of the scheme is to support the continuation of these farming practices and encourage measures that will enhance the environment. The Cotswold Hills ESA has been designated because the area is an outstanding example of limestone scenery comprising a prominent escarpment with unimproved grassland and ancient woodland in the west and in the east, rolling countryside, large fields, stone walls and hedges.

8.7.6. The primary purpose of designation of the Cotswolds AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. In order to do this, development on a large scale will be resisted. Only where there is a proven need for the development to take place, and there is a lack of acceptable alternative sites available, will large scale development be considered as an exception.

8.7.7. Where development in the AONB is acceptable in principle, special emphasis will be placed on scale, location and siting. A particularly high standard of design and landscaping will be required and new buildings and landscaping must be in sympathy with their surroundings and respect features of importance to the character of the area.

POLICY N6

Within the Cotswolds AONB, as defined on the Proposals Map, priority will be given to the preservation and enhancement of the landscape. Large scale development that would cause unacceptable harm will not be permitted unless there is a proven need for the development to take place and there is no acceptable alternative site available.

Small scale development within, or affecting the setting of, the AONB will only be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

- 1. the nature, siting and scale are sympathetic to the landscape;**
- 2. the design and materials complement the character of the area; and**
- 3. important landscape features and trees are retained and appropriate landscaping measures are undertaken.**

Special Landscape Area

8.7.8. Special Landscape Areas are defined in the Gloucestershire County Structure Plan: Second Review as areas recognised as being of county-level importance. The aim of their designation is to ensure that development proposals pay particular attention to the surrounding landscape characteristics and

provide an opportunity to achieve enhancements where the landscape has been degraded. A Special Landscape Area is defined where the topography is a continuation of the adjacent AONB and/or where the vegetation and associated features are characteristic of the AONB.

8.7.9. The area between the Gloucester Urban Area and the Cotswolds, including Robinswood Hill, is referred to in the County Structure Plan as a Special Landscape Area and its precise boundaries are defined within this Local Plan and on the Proposals Map.

8.7.10. It is recognised that some development proposals will provide benefits that will outweigh the adverse effects upon the landscape. In these instances, the Council will seek to minimise any adverse effects and where possible, will seek appropriate compensatory measures in the form of landscaping proposals. It may also prove necessary to impose conditions on planning permissions or to seek planning agreements covering the issue.

8.7.11. The District Council will also seek to promote landscape improvement by ensuring suitable landscaping schemes accompany development proposals and by supporting, wherever possible, other agencies involved in improvement work.

POLICY N7

When considering development proposals in the Special Landscape Area, as defined on the Proposals Map, priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the landscape character. Permission will not be granted to development which would reduce the quality of the landscape character unless the benefits to the community outweigh the adverse effect on the landscape character.

Landscape Character

8.7.12. One of the key components of English Nature's Strategy for the 1990's has been the Natural Areas approach. The local distinctiveness of each part of England was examined to identify its characteristic wildlife and natural features to define a series of Natural Areas. Each Natural Area Profile summarises the key features of nature conservation importance, the factors that have influenced that resource, identified major issues affecting nature conservation and proposed nature conservation objectives. Two Natural Areas have been identified covering Stroud District - The Cotswolds and the Severn and Avon Vales.

8.7.13. Developing this approach at a local level, a district-wide landscape assessment was carried out in 1996. Its purpose was to provide a comprehensive statement of landscape character and quality across the entire District and to give a better understanding of the landscape types, their character and quality and their interaction with each other across the entire District.

8.7.14. The assessment was based on the Countryside Character Approach developed by the Countryside Commission and focused primarily on the visual aspects of the landscape. The key characteristics, landform and context, land use and landscape pattern, settlement and vernacular character, human response, sensitivity to change and key priorities for action have been identified for 12 Landscape Character Areas. These are summarised in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance, which has been published simultaneously with the Local Plan.

POLICY N8

Development proposals should seek to conserve and enhance the special features and diversity of the different landscape character types found within the District as identified in the Stroud District Landscape Assessment. Priority will be given to the protection of the quality and diversity of landscape character.

Development will only be permitted if all the following criteria are met:

- 1. the character and appearance of the landscape is not unacceptably harmed;**
- 2. trees and other natural features which contribute to the landscape setting are retained and managed;**
- 3. there is no unacceptable impact on long distance views; and**
- 4. the benefits of the proposed development exceed the harmful effects on the landscape.**

8.7.15. Any harmful effects upon the landscape of any development proposal will be ameliorated through negotiation, the imposition of planning conditions and/or planning obligations.

Areas of High Quality Landscape

8.7.16. The District-Wide Landscape Assessment also identifies the following areas as being Areas of High Quality Landscape:

STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT FOR DEPOSIT - NOVEMBER 1999

8. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Table 8.1: Areas of High Quality Landscape

1.	Land at Upton St Leonards to the south and east of the village up to the AONB boundary.
2.	Estuarine Landscapes.
3.	Historic Landscape Area: - Whitcliff Park - Frampton.
4.	Natural Watercourses: - River Frome - Little Avon River - Huntingford to Woodford.

POLICY N9

The following areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, are designated as Areas of High Quality Landscape and permission will not be granted to development which would harm their character, appearance or special landscape qualities:

1. Land at Upton St. Leonards to the south and east of the village up to the AONB boundary.
2. Estuarine landscapes relating to the River Severn
3. Historic landscape areas.
4. Natural watercourses..

Trees and Woodlands

8.7.17. Trees and woodlands are prominent natural features in the landscape of the District. They are an important renewable resource, valuable not only for their timber production and for their aesthetic quality, but also for nature conservation and recreation. However they can be easily lost through age, disease, storm damage and farming practices, as well as through development and indiscriminate felling. The District also contains many Ancient Woodlands, several of which are of national importance because of their specialised wildlife communities.

8.7.18. The Council has the power under Town and Country Planning legislation to protect trees by making Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). These can be applied to individual trees, groups of trees, woodlands or areas of trees that make a significant contribution to the amenity and character of an area, and are under threat of indiscriminate or inappropriate felling. TPOs prohibit the felling, lopping or topping of trees without Council approval. In Conservation Areas six weeks written notice must be given to the Council prior to carrying out works to trees to allow the Council to impose TPOs if appropriate.

8.7.19. The District Council recognises the contribution made to the landscape of Stroud District

by the high quality and quantity of tree cover and is committed to conserving and retaining existing trees and ensuring that the proper management of woodlands takes place.

POLICY N10

Development will not be permitted if it would damage or destroy trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order, or identified as Ancient Woodland, or in a Conservation Area unless either:

1. the removal of one or more trees would be in the interests of good arboricultural practice; or
2. the benefits of the proposed development outweighs the amenity value of the protected trees.

8.7.20. If the removal of trees is permitted as part of a development, a condition may require that new trees of an appropriate species and size are planted either on or near the site.

Hedgerows

8.7.21. Hedgerows are an important part of the landscape in much of the rural area of Stroud District. It is illegal to remove most countryside hedgerows without approval from the Local Planning Authority. There are various circumstances when approval is required to remove a hedgerow. The LPA will assess the hedgerow using criteria which identifies hedgerows of particular archaeological, historical, wildlife or landscape value to determine whether it is classified as 'important' as defined under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. If the hedgerow is not important, the removal of the hedgerow cannot be prevented. There is a strong presumption that important hedgerows will be protected, and a hedgerow retention notice will be issued where appropriate.

8.7.22. Development which involves the removal of an important hedgerow will normally be resisted. Exceptions will be when the loss of the hedgerow is not significant to the character or appearance of the landscape, nature conservation, or archaeological interests, or where the desirability of the proposed development outweighs the amenity value of the hedgerow. It is advisable that the District Council is contacted prior to undertaking any works to hedgerows.

POLICY N11

Development will not be permitted if it would destroy or significantly damage an important hedgerow unless either:

- 1. the removal of the hedgerow would not be significant to the character or appearance of the landscape, its nature conservation or archaeological interest; or**
- 2. the desirability of the proposed development outweighs the amenity value of the hedgerow.**

New Development

8.7.23. Both the retention of existing natural landscape features and new planting and landscaping can greatly enhance and complement new development, and soften its impact on the landscape. When considering development proposals therefore, the Council will seek to achieve a balance between the design, bulk and siting of new buildings and the retention of existing, or the creation of new, landscape features. The Council will also require a high quality of landscaping, appropriate to the area, in new development.

8.7.24. Developers will be required to take suitable steps to ensure the protection of retained trees during development and, in appropriate cases, the Council will impose conditions to ensure that landscaping proposals and tree retention/protection are satisfactorily implemented.

POLICY N12

New development will only be permitted where high quality landscaping (hard and soft, built and natural) appropriate to the area is proposed.

8.7.25. The submission of site details which accurately show the position and species of all existing trees, hedges and shrubs and indicate those to be removed/retained, any proposed ground level changes, and details of how they are to be protected during development will be required. Details of underground works are also to be submitted to avoid damage to roots and consequent tree loss.

8.8. Agriculture and Forestry

Agriculture

8.8.1. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the District and will continue to influence the character and quality of the landscape whilst also providing employment and supporting the rural

economy. Recent changes in agricultural practices have resulted in a significant reduction in the use of land for food production but agriculture remains the major influence in the appearance, character and use of the countryside in Stroud District. The Council will continue to respond to the changes taking place in the agricultural industry and encourage a balance between protecting the countryside and allowing change and new development to help sustain and improve the rural economy.

8.8.2. Government policy stresses the importance of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land from irreversible development. MAFF classifies this type of land as Grades 1, 2 and 3a. Proposals involving the permanent loss of land in these Grades will not be permitted, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where there is a choice of sites for development, it should be directed towards land of lower agricultural grade, unless other planning criteria direct otherwise.

POLICY N13

Development will not be permitted on the best and most versatile land (Grades 1, 2 or 3a) unless both the following criteria are met:

- 1. there is no suitable alternative site of lesser agricultural value capable of accommodating the proposed development within the Plan area which meets the other objectives of the Plan; and**
- 2. there is a proven need for the development proposed.**

Forestry

8.8.3. The Forestry Authority is responsible for administering Central Government forestry policy and, through the felling licence procedure and grant aid schemes, acts to regulate the felling of woodlands and to encourage multi-purpose woodland management and new planting.

8.8.4. Forestry or tree planting is not subject to planning control. Whereas the Local Planning Authority can, in the interests of amenity, make TPOs which protect woodlands and trees from wilful damage or destruction, the Forestry Authority is in a position to encourage sound woodland management. The preservation of woodland without management will lead to a decline in nature conservation and aesthetic value as well as timber value. The District Council will therefore encourage woodland management agreements in preference or in addition to woodland designations of TPOs.

8.9. Groundwater Resources

8.9.1. Maintaining or enhancing the water quality of rivers, lakes, ponds and other water bodies is crucial to sustaining biodiversity, ensuring human health and providing for a range of uses including industry, recreation and agriculture. It is important to ensure that development does not pose a risk to the quantity, quality and availability of surface and groundwater resources.

8.9.2. The Environment Agency has responsibility for conserving and managing water resources, pollution control and flood defence. The Agency is in the process of developing national and regional Water Resource Strategies and Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPs) to cover the full range of the Agency's responsibilities. The Environment Agency's document 'Policy and Practice for the Protection of Groundwater' and its supporting maps defines Groundwater Protection Zones and also identifies aquifers and their vulnerability to pollution. Developers should have regard to guidance contained in these plans, and should contact the Environment Agency in this regard. Development should only take place where adequate water resources exist, or can be made available, without adversely affecting existing abstraction, river flows, water quality, agriculture, amenity or nature conservation.

POLICY N14

Permission will not be granted to any development which would be likely to affect unacceptably the water environment, including surface waters, groundwater levels and resources.

8.10. Berkeley Cemetery

PROPOSAL N15

Approximately 0.4 hectares of land adjacent to Berkeley Cemetery is allocated as an extension to the existing cemetery grounds.

8.10.1. The need for new burial land has been identified in Berkeley. A suitable site is adjacent to the existing cemetery and is proposed as an extension to it. This should satisfy the land requirements for the Local Plan period and for some years afterwards. The land is of sufficient size to allow for a well integrated extension with appropriate landscaping on the perimeter of and within the site.