**Durham County Plan**

**Policy 36**

**Development in the Countryside**

Planning permission for development in the countryside will only be granted where at least one of the following exceptions may apply:

1. The land is allocated for development in the County Durham Plan;
2. The development proposals are considered necessary for the efficient operation of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and other appropriate land based businesses, including the diversification of activities on existing farm units which do not prejudice the agricultural use;
3. Where sustainable enhancements to the countryside, landscape and biodiversity will result, including proposals for tourism and leisure developments which benefit local communities and visitors such as, walking, horse riding or cycling; or
4. Proposals for the change of use of existing appropriate buildings which are in keeping with, or would enhance, their setting; are soundly built and capable of being adapted without complete or substantial re-building and/or extension; have no significant adverse impact on the users of other land and buildings; which directly support the retention of local services and community facilities; and represent a sustainable and viable use that will enhance the local rural economy.

Where development is considered acceptable, it will be required to be unobtrusive and must respect the form, scale and character of the landscape. For example, through careful siting, design and use of materials. New buildings should be sited adjacent to existing buildings or building groups, rather than isolated in the landscape.

Proposals should have no significant adverse effects on, and where appropriate enhance and expand, nature conservation and heritage features, contributing to the delivery of biodiversity action plans, habitat enhancement, and landscape character.

Proposals will not be permitted if they result in a level of visual impact, light pollution, noise, traffic or activity which is out of keeping with its countryside location, in accordance with Policy 19 (Air and Light Pollution) of the plan.

**8.4** The policy approach in the Local Plans of many former District Councils in County Durham was to identify settlement boundaries as the mechanism for establishing the acceptability of the location of new development. This Policy sets out a new and more objective approach to assessing the sustainability of new development, based on the performance of proposals against identified criteria, which does not rely on settlement boundaries.

**8.5** As a general principle, new development will be directed to sites within built up areas, or sites allocated for development, whilst the countryside will be protected from inappropriate development. Land which is not within existing built up areas, if not allocated for development on the Proposals Map, will be treated as 'countryside'.

**8.6** As well as providing leisure and recreational opportunities the countryside is a constantly changing workplace. It is necessary to balance and integrate the requirement to protect the countryside with the need to sustain and encourage the vitality and viability of the rural economy, including agriculture and tourism. Whilst many of the activities in the countryside are outside the scope of planning control, there are other forms of development which can be accommodated without detrimental effect on the countryside.

**8.7** New buildings should, wherever possible, respect the style and character of the locality. Proposals for new buildings in the countryside outside of existing settlements or on land not allocated for development will be strictly controlled. Development of housing exceptions will be dealt with under Policy 32.

**8.8** There is a varied range of buildings in the countryside which are no longer suitable for their original purposes. The majority are likely to be agricultural buildings but there may also be churches, chapels, mills, schools, public houses, stables and others for which an alternative use is being sought. Many of these buildings make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Provided they are structurally sound, conversion of these buildings, for example to employment or community use, visitor accommodation or housing can safeguard their future. By re-using existing resources, conversions can also meet the aims of sustainable built development. However, there are some buildings which are not suitable for conversion, including those which are: structurally unsound; roofless, missing substantial sections of wall, or so ruined that only vestiges remain of the original structure; of temporary construction; eyesores which should be removed in the interests of landscape conservation; unsuitable in terms of size and form of construction; or, at risk of flooding.