

### Introduction

- 11.01** Modern day leisure pursuits cover a wide variety of activities and impinge on many different types of location, both urban and rural.
- 11.02** The quality and availability of recreation and leisure facilities is essential to “quality of life”. Parks, play areas, playing fields, sports centres and swimming pools are important facilities. Enjoyment of the countryside and coast for a range of recreational and sporting activities is vital for many people. In addition to the area’s resident population, holidaymakers clearly place demand on such facilities.
- 11.03** Trends in tourism have changed as new types of activity, new attractions and new destinations become popular. Tourism business includes accommodation, catering, transport, tourist attractions and all the other amenities and facilities designed to cater for the needs of visitors. There is also an overlap with related areas such as shopping, sport, entertainment, the arts and other recreation and leisure activities. Tourist expenditure in Britain totals around £37 billion, including about £5 billion spent by domestic day visitors.
- 11.04** Tourism is a significant component of Sedgemoor’s economy, accounting for about 14% of local employment. It embraces not just holiday making but all other forms of visit, such as business conferences and special events.
- 11.05** The West Country Tourist Board is attempting to increase the level of visitor business in the winter, spring and late autumn. This would not only help to consolidate and stabilise the benefits of tourism for the local economy but also helps to justify investment in facilities.
- 11.06** It is estimated that about 3 million visitor nights are spent in Sedgemoor each year. This represents 35% of the County total and is dominated by the caravan, camping and holiday centres of the Brean, Berrow and Burnham-on-Sea coastal area. There are about 35,000 visitors in this area at peak season.
- 11.07** Cheddar is another important tourist destination, both for staying visitors and day visitors. Sedgemoor’s tourism business is fundamentally dependent on natural environmental assets (sandy beaches, Cheddar Gorge, attractive countryside) and accessibility. The Plan will have an important role in safeguarding such assets.

The area’s potential to develop a “green tourism” profile (such as low impact holidays based on walking, cycling and bird watching) should be exploited.

### Key Objective

To promote forms of recreational and leisure pursuits together with a range and mix of facilities, which provide opportunities for both local people and visitors to pursue their interests; which support local culture, heritage and economic development; without harming our unique environmental assets and where possible contribute to reducing the need to travel by car.

Our specific objective for sport and recreation is to ensure that adequate land and water resources are available both for organised sport and for informal recreation, by:

- a) protecting open space and other land with recreational value; and
- b) making proposals for additional sport, recreation and open space provision where needed.

In planning for sustainable tourism development the objective is to foster development and enhancement of tourism facilities in the District while at the same time protecting and enhancing the natural environment and man-made heritage.

### Protection of Recreational Open Space

- 11.08** The Local Plan seeks to resist the loss of existing recreational open space. Land to be protected includes:
- a) outdoor sports facilities (playing fields, sports grounds, tennis courts etc.) including not only Local Authority sites but also private and education sector sites if the facilities are available for public use, whether through a membership scheme or otherwise.
  - b) children’s playing space (equipped play grounds, kick-about areas and other play areas); and
  - c) other public open space and recreation sites, including ornamental parks/gardens, allotments, village greens and fishing lakes.

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**11.09** To aid interpretation of this Policy most of these sites are identified on the Proposals Map, using information derived from District Council sources and a survey of Parish Councils. Further details of the survey are set out in a Local Plan Background Paper "Review of Playing Fields, Play areas and Open Spaces".

**11.10** Sites in categories (a) and (b) above are directly relevant to the assessment of outdoor playing space against the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) "Six Acre Standard" which recommends that a minimum of 2.4 hectares (6.0 acres) per 1,000 population should be available. The NPFA guidance further recommends that this should be comprised of 1.6 hectares (4 acres) for outdoor sport and 0.8 hectares (2 acres) for Children's Playing Space. Existing provision in Sedgemoor Parishes is summarised at Appendix 11.1.

**11.11** The NPFA defines outdoor playing space as: "space which is available for sport, active recreation or children's play, which is of suitable size and nature for its intended purpose, safely accessible and available to the general public." This definition excludes such things as:

- golf facilities;
- indoor sports or leisure centres;
- water used for recreation; and
- verges, woodlands, commons, ornamental parks and gardens.

**11.12** These types of facility or open space cannot be regarded as substitutes for elements of the NPFA standard, but make a valuable contribution to the total recreational provision of communities in the area. Their availability may be particularly relevant as a mitigating circumstance if there is a local deficiency of outdoor playing space.

**11.13** This Local Plan Policy seeks to safeguard the existing levels of outdoor playing space. Separate proposals aim to address specific deficiencies.

**11.14** In accordance with legislation, the District Council will consult the English Sports Council as statutory consultees on any application that is on land which has been:

- a) used as a playing field (a site of at least 0.4 hectares encompassing at least one playing pitch) at any time in the five years before the application and which remains undeveloped; or

- b) allocated for use as a playing field in the Local Plan; or

- c) involves the replacement of the surface of the grass playing pitch with a synthetic pitch.

### **POLICY RLT1**

**Development which would result in the loss of recreational open space will not be permitted unless:**

- a) **the existing sports and recreation facilities can best be retained and enhanced through the redevelopment of a small part of the site; or**

- b) **a replacement facility of equivalent sports and/or recreation benefit is made available; or**

- c) **the proposed development provides sports and/or recreation facilities of greater benefit than the long-term recreational value of the open space that would be lost.**

### **Provision of Outdoor Playing Space for Children in Association with New Residential Development**

**11.15** The Local Plan seeks to provide outdoor play space based on the recommendations of the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) which call for the provision of different types of play areas for a range of age groups. Chapter 4 (pages 19-37) of the NPFA publication "The Six Acre Standard: Minimum Standards for Outdoor Playing Space (2001)" provides detailed and illustrated guidance on the siting, accessibility, content and layout of such sites. A summary including the definition of 'LAP', 'LEAP' and 'NEAP' is set out at Appendix 11.2.

**11.16** The Local Plan Policy on "Outdoor Playing Space for Children" is intended to ensure that all new residential developments meet the NPFA minimum standards so that the successive generations of children have adequate opportunities for outdoor play. As settlements grow it is important to maintain:

- a) an appropriate total amount of playspace land; and
- b) appropriate local accessibility.

**11.17** The developers of new sites cannot be required to make good any existing local deficiencies of playspace provision but they will be required to meet needs arising from their development. In overall terms the NPFA “Six Acre Standard” recommends that there should be 0.8 hectares of playspace per 1,000 population; this can be translated to a need to ensure that for every new house built, 20m<sup>2</sup> of new playspace is created. Where possible the Council will expect this provision to be made on-site by the developer, together with provision of appropriate equipment, landscaping and commuted sums to cover future maintenance. NPFA guidance suggests that a LAP should be provided on any development of 15 (or more) houses and a LEAP will be needed on sites of 50 (or more) houses. Provision of a NEAP will usually be off-site but contributions to the cost of establishing such a facility will be required.

**11.18** In practice this could, for example, mean that a developer proposing to build 30 houses will provide a LAP on site (which directly contributes around 100m<sup>2</sup> to the stock of playspace) and meet the balance of the 600m<sup>2</sup> additional space the development needs by financial contribution to a fund for land acquisition and creation of LEAP and NEAP facilities elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

### **POLICY RLT2**

**All new housing which can potentially be occupied by households with children should include appropriate provision for children’s outdoor playing space. In determining the form of facilities to be provided, account will be taken of the nature of existing facilities in the vicinity but provision should normally be to the following standards:**

- a) increase the stock of children’s play space at a rate of 20 square metres per new dwelling; and**
- b) in the case for a site for 15 or more dwellings, a suitable range of play spaces should be equipped and accessible as follows:**
  - i) all new houses to be within 100 metres of a “Local Area for Play” (LAP); and**
  - ii) all new houses to be within 400 metres of a “Local Equipped Area for Play” (LEAP); and**

- iii) all new houses to be within 1000 metres of a “Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP).**

**Where the requirement for play space cannot be fully met on site, the developer will be expected to make provision for appropriate new or improved off-site facilities.**

### **Provision of Outdoor Sport Facilities in Conjunction with New Residential Development**

**11.19** The Local Plan seeks to provide outdoor sports facilities based on the recommendations of the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) as set out in their 2001 publication “The Six Acre Standard: Minimum Standards for Outdoor Playing Space”. The NPFA recommend that outdoor playing space for sport should be to a minimum standard of 1.6 hectares per 1,000 population. This translates to a need to ensure that for every new house built, 40m<sup>2</sup> of extra land for outdoor sports facilities should be found (calculation assumes average household size of 2.5 persons).

**11.20** The NPFA expect their minimum standard to serve as a target when assessing the adequacy of existing sports provision. The results of our parish-by-parish assessment are summarised at Appendix 11.1, Table 1. The developers of new sites cannot be required to make good any existing local deficiencies, but it is clear that all new development will add incrementally to the demands placed on existing facilities for youth and adult use. The most widespread facilities are football, rugby, cricket and hockey pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens. Archery, athletics tracks and training grounds etc are also relevant but golf courses are not eligible for inclusion. The NPFA recognise that there is no precise way of predicting the sporting and physical recreation preferences and choices of those who will move into new developments. However, the clear purpose of setting a minimum standard is to ensure that the stock of land available for sport at the local level increases, if settlements are expanding.

**11.21** In the case of large development sites it may be appropriate that the space for outdoor sport is provided on-site, perhaps as an element of a local park, but in most instances the provision will be off-site. A developer may be able to fulfil his obligation by providing a suitable site or alternatively will be required to pay money into

a fund for site acquisition and development, including changing facilities, drainage and landscaping as appropriate. These matters will be addressed in further detail in a supplementary planning guidance document.

- 11.22** In some areas the Local Plan has identified and allocated a preferred site. In other localities, where a suitable field for future outdoor sports use, could conceivably be found, at any one of several locations, no specific allocation is made in the Local Plan.

### **POLICY RLT3**

**All new housing developments will normally be expected to contribute towards the provision of outdoor sites for sport at a rate of 40 square metres per dwelling. In determining the nature of the provision required, account will be taken of the type of dwellings proposed and the quantity and quality of existing outdoor sports provision in the area.**

### **Proposals for Public Open Space and Outdoor Sports**

#### **Land Between Wembdon and the Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road**

- 11.23** This land is a major segment of the “green wedge” separating Wembdon and Bridgwater, which was originally identified when the Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road Development Guide was adopted in 1982. There have previously been no specific proposals for the area, the expectation simply being that the land would remain in agricultural use.
- 11.24** In circumstances where Bridgwater is already under-provided with outdoor sports pitches, and where new development in the vicinity of this area will increase demands for such facilities and give rise to significant demands for informal open space and play areas, the Council consider that this land is particularly appropriate for future use as playing fields and other public open space. Such uses are entirely appropriate in the ‘green wedge’. (Policy CNE4).
- 11.25** Wembdon Cricket Club, who currently lease a County Council owned site at Chilton Trinity, are known to be particularly interested in the possibility of establishing a new ground in this area. A submission on behalf of the club in response to the Local Plan Issues consultation paper (1998) identified the largest field in this area

(immediately east of the existing Wembdon playing field) as being ideally suited, (as it is level), can accommodate a cricket ground with a 55 yard boundary and would have the parish church as a splendid backdrop. The Council entirely agree with this view. The next field adjoining to the east is large enough to accommodate a football pitch. Fields to the east again lie adjacent to Crowpill Path (which is a well-used local footpath and also forms part of the longer-distance “Parrett Trail”) have significant trees on two of their boundaries and will be well suited to serve as general purpose public open space to meet the needs of future residents.

- 11.26** Land to the south of the suggested cricket ground is crossed by two public footpaths and can be wet in places. It is not particularly suitable for sports pitches but could provide a mix of equipped and informal play areas, dog exercise areas and nature areas. A major tree planting scheme along the edge of the Northern Distributor Road through the whole of this area will reinforce the function of the “green wedge”.

### **PROPOSAL RLT4**

**Land between Wembdon and the Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road is allocated for public open space and outdoor sports (10 hectares, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

#### **Land at College Way, Bridgwater**

- 11.27** This land is part of a former landfill site which is now grassed over and available for informal recreation. The District Council owns the site. It represents a major opportunity to create a new local park, which will meet the recreational needs of residents in the Bath Road area and enhance the approach to Bridgwater College.
- 11.28** It is proposed that an avenue of trees will be planted on the College Way frontage. The park will include other tree and shrub planting, surfaced paths, seating, children’s play equipment and a large kickabout area. There is also potential to create a new access point at the northern corner of the site which would open up a cycle track opportunity and the possibility of vehicular rear access to numbers 100-134 Bath Road.

### **PROPOSAL RLT5**

**Land at College Way, Bridgwater is allocated for public open space (1.27 hectares, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

### Land between Stoddens Road and Brent Broad, Burnham-on-Sea

**11.29** This land is adjacent to the established Burnham Association of Sports Clubs (BASC) sports ground. The Association's aspirations to extend the facility have been constrained by the "protected roadline" for the possible northwards extension of the "Eastern Distributor Road", their planning application for a proposal involving a 16.9 hectare site (bounded by Crooked Lane to the east) had to be refused because of this constraint.

**11.30** There is a current shortfall of about 6 hectares of land for outdoor sports at Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge when assessed against National Playing Fields Association standards. The allocated site is contained by the road line and amounts to a little over 8 hectares. However, the safeguarded road line was deleted at the Local Plan Modifications stage and there is now potential for recreation use to be permitted on additional land in this area.

#### PROPOSAL RLT6

**Land between Stoddens Road and Brent Broad, Burnham-on-Sea is allocated for recreation use (outdoor sports grounds). (8.26 hectares, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

### Land between the Leisure Centre and the River Yeo at Cheddar

**11.31** This land is the western edge of a field which is allocated for the extension of the Kings of Wessex School playing fields (Proposal PCS11b). Its primary purpose will be to provide a green corridor for an important cycle track/footpath link. The route will not only serve local journeys but will also be a link in a wider National Cycle Network route between Clevedon and Shepton Mallet. Tree planting and the provision of seating in this area would create an attractive amenity, with fine views towards the church. This will be available for all to enjoy but has a particular advantage of being accessible from nearby employment sites at lunchtime.

**11.32** The village of Cheddar has a significant deficiency of existing children's play space but few site opportunities to remedy the shortfall. Provision of some play equipment within this open space corridor will be appropriate. In the short-term there is no certainty that funds will be available for implementation of this proposal but it will be

particularly required if a further phase of housing development south of the River Yeo is ever permitted. The area is therefore safeguarded for this purpose and no other form of development will be permitted.

#### PROPOSAL RLT8

**Land between the Leisure Centre and the River Yeo at Cheddar is allocated for public open space (0.55 hectares, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

### Land adjacent to the Existing Red Road Playing Field and Village Hall at Berrow

**11.33** The existing sports facilities at Berrow (junior and adult football pitches, cricket and archery) are already heavily utilised by local clubs who draw membership from within and beyond Berrow Parish. The Parish Council is keen to provide additional pitches and replace temporary changing facilities and toilets with a purpose-built facility.

**11.34** This 1.74 hectare field adjacent to the existing playing fields is of an appropriate size. It has the particular advantage of also being adjacent to the existing village hall, a building which is potentially extendable to create changing rooms, that would have access to existing social facilities. At present the village hall is separated from the existing playing fields by the allocated site.

#### PROPOSAL RLT10

**Land adjacent to the existing Red Road Playing Field and Village Hall at Berrow is allocated for playing field development (1.74 hectares, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

### Land at Church Road, Brean

**11.35** This proposal is carried forward from the Burnham-on-Sea Area Local Plan but on a reduced site, taking account of the fact that land immediately north of the church is now a car park. The Parish Council intend to provide a recreation area to meet the needs of the village, including seating, play equipment, a ball games area and tree planting.

#### PROPOSAL RLT19

**Land adjacent to St Bridget's Church, Church Road, Brean is allocated for public open space (1.00 hectare, as defined on the Proposals Map).**

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### Golf Courses

**11.36** There are five existing golf courses in the District and the Council's Sports and Recreation Strategy (1994) identified the potential need for one more. Planning permissions have previously been granted for two new courses. Golf course proposals can raise a range of planning issues; detailed advice on assessing impact and on design principles is available in publications such as "Golf Courses in the Countryside" an advisory booklet published by the Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency) in 1993. Any future proposals in the District will be expected to have regard to such guidance and to landscape, nature conservation, transport accessibility, rights of way and other relevant policies in the Local Plan.

### Countryside Recreation: Access

**11.37** It is important to ensure that existing opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the countryside are protected and where appropriate are enhanced.

**11.38** Access to the countryside for a range of informal recreational activities is an important element of quality of life for many people. This can take many forms - walking, cycling, horse riding, touring by car, picnicking; it might/might not have a specific additional objective (e.g. bird watching, visit a particular place or viewpoint) and might be regular (e.g. walking a dog) or relatively infrequent (e.g. a Sunday outing or summer picnic).

**11.39** Within the District there is a substantial range of opportunities for countryside recreation, including not only the public rights of way network but also some extensive areas of National Trust land with open public access, Forestry Commission trails and the beaches.

**11.40** There are two recognised long distance footpaths which pass through the District - the "West Mendip Way" and the "Parrett Trail" - and there are several significant proposals for recreational cycle routes. One of the National Cycle Network "Millennium Routes" - Bristol to Padstow - passes through the southern half of the District and there are two other proposals for arterial routes which Somerset County Council is, in conjunction with neighbouring authorities, implementing as additional elements of the National Cycle Network - a 'coast to coast' route from Weston-super-Mare to Seaton and a 'Cheddar Valley Line' route from Clevedon to Shepton Mallet. Some of

these cycle route proposals pick up suggestions first identified in "Pedal the Levels" a study commissioned by the County Council in 1994 to create a network of cycle routes which would release the potential that exists for cycle-based tourism in the Somerset Levels and Moors.

**11.41** Growth of car ownership and car usage have had a variety of impacts on countryside recreation, on the one hand broadening opportunities to those with access to a car, but on the other hand bringing adverse impacts such as:

- increased traffic on country roads making them less attractive and less safe for walking, cycling and horse riding; and
- increased pressure at popular sites (footpath erosion, litter, demand for parking space and other facilities).

**11.42** In some instances these sorts of conflicts need active intervention such as traffic management, but another key element of a sustainable approach is to maximise the opportunities available for residents and visitors to enjoy local countryside without using a car. In particular this means that:

- a) locally accessible footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes in the vicinity of settlements need to be protected and if possible enhanced; and
- b) if built development is allowed and in particular if urban areas expand, existing rights of way should be protected, not simply as access routes, but also as attractive "green corridors" with natural vegetation (grass margins, trees, hedgerows) to ensure that links connecting the existing urban area to adjacent countryside are attractive and pleasant to use.

**11.43** Development of any site which is crossed by, or is immediately adjacent to a footpath, bridleway or cycle track will be expected to make proper provision for its continued enjoyment as a public asset. Particular attention should be paid to detail in respect of boundary structures, landscaping and associated spaces.

**11.44** Proposals which would involve the closure or diversion of an existing public right of way will not be permitted, unless a suitable alternative route which is of equal or greater convenience and amenity value is made available.

**11.45** There are many past examples of developments that have retained a route by merely running it along a gap between property boundaries (such as rear garden fences). Such a minimalist approach tends to create an unfriendly and potentially dangerous environment for users rather than a pleasant walkway and this form of treatment will be discouraged.

**11.46** Policy RLT11 will be applicable throughout the District but is likely to be of particular significance in the vicinity of settlements and/or major recreational routes.

### **POLICY RLT11**

**The existing public rights of way network will be protected and maintained in order to facilitate public access to the countryside. Additional permissive access routes may also be sought. Development which would adversely affect the recreational or amenity value of a public footpath, bridleway, cycle track or other public right of way will not be permitted unless a suitable alternative route is made available.**

### **New Recreational Walking, Cycling and/or Horse Riding Routes**

**11.47** In addition to cycle networks proposed in the Town Transport Studies, the County and District Councils are working with neighbouring authorities and other partners such as Sustrans and the Environment Agency to create longer distance recreational routes. Such routes are intended to underpin the development of cycle-based tourism in the County (as outlined in para 11.40 above) and also have an important function as recreational cycling routes offering local residents convenient access to surrounding countryside. These routes are not exclusively off-road and it is intended that they serve not only as a linear route but also open up opportunities for people to enjoy circular routes using relatively quiet country lanes.

**11.48** The existing/proposed routes are shown on Figure 11.1. Only those sections of proposed route on land which is not highway and where planning permission may be required are shown on the Proposals Map. We will work with the County Council, Sustrans, Environment Agency and other relevant bodies to ensure these routes are designed and built to provide a safe and attractive network. In all instances it is expected that the routes will be open to walkers and

cyclists and provisions will also be made for horse riding if sufficient width is available (e.g. the Cossington-Bawdrip railway cutting is suitable but the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal towpath is not). The routes identified on the Proposals Map reflect those identified at the time of Local Plan preparation but these may be subject to change during the course of detailed project development for environmental, financial or other reasons.

### **POLICY RLT12**

**Proposals for development that would prejudice the creation of recreational walking, cycling and/or horse riding routes shown on the Proposals Map will not be permitted.**

**Any major housing, employment or tourism development proposals in the vicinity of these routes should make appropriate connections in order to facilitate local access.**

**11.49** The specific sections of route shown on the Proposals Map are:

#### **a) Cheddar - District Boundary at Draycott**

This route will extend the existing Cheddar Valley Cycle Path, firstly on a route associated with proposed public open space and new housing development and then along existing droves. Beyond the District Boundary the route will extend to Wells and Shepton Mallet and become a leg of the National Cycle Network. The potential to use the course of the old railway in this area is not available because of bridge and embankment removal and construction of buildings since the railway closed in the 1960s. Being a high-profile visitor destination, with Youth Hostel, campsites and bed and breakfast accommodation, Cheddar is seen as an important node on this route and the broader "Pedal the Levels" network.

#### **b) Burnham-on-Sea - West Huntspill**

This route forms part of the coast-to-coast route from Clevedon to Seaton which is a leg of the National Cycle Network. It is also the western section of the revised "Spine Route" for the Pedal the Levels project, linking inland to Glastonbury. Use of the promenade at Burnham-on-Sea will require removal of current "no cycling" restrictions, but in principle there is no reason why shared use by pedestrians and cyclists should pose a problem and has the advantage of sea

views that are not available from the alternative on-road route on South Esplanade. The route continues on the north bank of the River Brue into Highbridge where proposed redevelopment of the boatyard and other land west of Newtown Road, Highbridge (Proposal H17) will create the opportunity of a direct link across to the Clyce Bridge. Connections into Highbridge and the railway station are also important. Out of Highbridge the route was originally intended to be on the sea defence embankment and the existing private access road along the Huntspill River to Sloway Bridge, but an alternative route away from sensitive estuarine habitats is being sought.

### **c) West Huntspill - Shapwick Heath**

At Sloway Bridge the coast-to-coast route becomes on-road southwards through Pawlett but the proposed Pedal the Levels Spine Route continues inland on the banks of the Huntspill River. Near Gold Corner and at Burtle the route is briefly on-road and then follows bridleways or droves before joining the former railway line alongside South Drain at Catcott Heath which then, links with the route from Glastonbury which was opened in 1998.

### **d) Course of old railway near Bason Bridge**

The Pedal the Levels Spine Route as originally conceived proposed to make more use of the old railway route between Highbridge and Burtle, but this proved to be impractical. The spine route will be useful not simply as a linear route, but can be used in sections as part of circular routes using local roads. This section of old railway has particular potential in the context of such circuits.

### **e) Pawlett - Bridgwater**

Between Pawlett and Bridgwater the coast-to-coast route is largely on the top of the river flood bank except at Dunball where a deviation via a local drove and the margins of the A38 is necessary in order to avoid the port facilities at Dunball Wharf. Within and near Bridgwater this route also has great potential for journey-to-work trips, particularly if links can be made onto the local road networks of existing and proposed employment sites.

### **f) Cheddar and Axbridge to Weare**

These linked routes on droves, footpaths and

riverside land are proposed as a means of linking settlements on the Cheddar Valley Cycle Path with the Isle of Wedmore and the wider Pedal the Levels network avoiding the busy A38 and B3151. A direct link from the existing Cheddar to Axbridge cycleway onto Sharpham Road in Cheddar would be of advantage for local journeys and would also serve to connect to these proposed wider routes.

### **g) King's Sedgemoor Drain**

A section of the National Cycle Network route between Bridgwater and Glastonbury will run along the bank of King's Sedgemoor Drain to make the link between country lanes at Bawdrip and Chedzoy. This route also forms part of the Pedal the Levels network.

### **Horse Riding Schools and Stables**

- 11.50** Horse riding is a popular recreational activity enjoyed by residents and visitors to the area. Many traditional farms have stables which were formerly used by working horses or other suitable buildings at which a riding school might be established. However it is important that such facilities are only established at appropriate and suitable locations. It is also particularly important that riders do not expose themselves or other road users to the avoidable hazards of busy roads. Also, bridleways should not be subject to such intense use as to render them difficult to use by walkers.
- 11.51** Proposals which utilise existing farm buildings are likely to satisfy criterion b) of this policy and would not raise issues of visual intrusion. Visual impact may become an issue if new buildings are proposed in any countryside location and particularly so within the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Guidelines for Horse-related Development in the Mendip Hills AONB were adopted as supplementary planning guidance in 2004. Policy CNE6 sets out the criteria for new equestrian buildings and regard should also be had to other Local Plan Policies which may be applicable (e.g. CNE7-10, CNE15-16, HE11, RLT11, PCS17).

### **POLICY RLT13**

**Riding schools or the keeping of horses for commercial / private recreational purposes will only be permitted if they:**

- a) have good access to a local network of lanes and bridleways or sufficient other**

**land for riding, all of which can be accessed without riding on or across a main road;**

- b) can achieve adequate site supervision and security without the need for erection of a new dwelling;**
- c) provide adequate arrangements for access, turning and parking of cars and trailers; and**
- d) do not have an unacceptable adverse impact on landscape, local amenity, highway safety, walkers or recognised nature conservation interests.**

### Commercial Leisure or Entertainment Facilities

**11.52** Proposals for new commercial leisure or entertainment facilities (cinema, nightclub, ten pin bowling, etc) will be considered against the provisions of Local Plan Policies TC6, TC7 and TC8.

**11.53** Historically, Town Centres were the chosen location for most commercial leisure facilities, but as with retail development there has been a trend towards out-of-town locations. In conjunction with our strategy seeking to maintain and enhance the viability and vitality of Town Centres, the defined Town Centres will be the preferred location for the development of new commercial leisure facilities. Such locations generally have optimum accessibility on foot or by public transport for the largest number of potential customers and the presence of leisure facilities is an important component of the mix of Town Centre uses. Visitors have convenient access to a range of food and drink outlets and other facilities, an advantage to users and businesses alike, which can contribute to vitality and viability not only during daytime but also into the evenings. Policy TC8 contains sufficient flexibility to allow proposals to be permitted elsewhere in appropriate circumstances. This could apply for example to the extension of an established leisure facility or conversion of a particularly suitable existing building. Major leisure uses on Edge-of-Town Centre sites may be acceptable under the terms of Policies TC7 and TC8.

### New Tourist Attractions

**11.54** Tourism is a major component of Sedgemoor's economy and accounts for about 14% of local

employment. PPG21 "Tourism" stresses the need for sustainable tourism which contributes to economic growth, but also ensures conservation of the environment. It is clear that this approach must underpin planning policy for tourism development in Sedgemoor. The tourism business is fundamentally dependent upon the natural assets of the District, both in the form of major features such as Cheddar Gorge and vast sandy beaches and also the countryside in more general terms.

**11.55** Much of the District is of designated national importance for nature conservation and/or outstanding natural beauty. This limits the scale and nature of new development that can be allowed in these areas, but there is also a duty to protect the countryside in general.

**11.56** The scale and nature of potential new visitor attractions could vary enormously, from small scale rural craft centres to major theme parks. In some instances the proposal may have a very specific locational requirement (e.g. access to a particular historic or landscape feature, or association with an established manufacturing site) and in other instances a range of sites might be suitable.

**11.57** The purpose of Policy RLT14 is to ensure that any proposed new visitor attraction is assessed in terms of the capacity of that particular location to cope with visitors. Other relevant considerations such as noise and visual impact will be assessed under the terms of other policies and guidance.

**11.58** This Council and the County Council are particularly mindful of the opportunities for Somerset to have a strong "green tourism" profile. Attractive landscapes, a wealth of history and heritage (prehistoric remains, places with specific links to King Alfred and the Saxons, historic buildings and sites), distinctive local produce (cider, cheese, wine, wicker goods) and important nature conservation sites of particular importance for bird life. These are amongst some of the ingredients and themes which will underpin the promotion of short breaks. The emphasis here is on developing a network of attractions which are neither intensive nor environmentally damaging, but do allow the visitor to discover and savour the distinctive characteristics of the area.

**11.59** The Council recognises the important contribution local public houses, inns and restaurants make to tourism and economic viability. In

many cases they also provide small-scale local visitor accommodation as well as a valuable community facility. Proposals for new or enhanced facilities will therefore be assessed against Policy RLT14 below whilst their retention is addressed under Policy PCS7

### **POLICY RLT14**

**A proposal for a new or enhanced tourist attraction will be only permitted if all the following criteria are met:**

- a) it will not lead to increased visitor pressures on such a scale as would harm the natural environment or man-made heritage in the locality;**
- b) the access roads are suitable for the likely traffic generation;**
- c) there is sufficient existing or proposed parking space to meet the needs of visitors; and**
- d) uses that would attract a significant number of people will be accessible by public transport in addition to other forms of transport.**

### **Cheddar Gorge**

**11.60** Cheddar Gorge is nationally famous as a visitor destination because of the spectacular gorge and caves. Tourism undoubtedly makes an important contribution to the economy of the Cheddar area. However, for many years there have also been concerns about the extent to which the adverse impacts of visitor pressure (traffic congestion, parking difficulties, unsympathetic commercial developments) not only threaten local environmental quality but also impact on visitors' perceptions and experience of this place. With the exception of parts of the commercialised area at the lower end, Cheddar Gorge lies within the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the undeveloped parts of the Gorge are also an important nature conservation site.

**11.61** The broad aim of the various bodies involved in the management of Cheddar Gorge, the local community and its visitors, is defined in the AONB Management Plan as: "To identify sustainable ways of improving opportunities for the public to enjoy the whole Gorge and tourism business to flourish in the lower Gorge in

harmony with the capacity of the natural and built environments to absorb visitors without detriment."

**11.62** A range of measures has been pursued by the Local Authorities and local landowners (sections of new footway have been provided, HGV traffic has been banned, a programme of scrub clearance and rockfall protection measures has been undertaken, a seasonal park and ride scheme has operated and various minor enhancements have been made). However, concerns persist about car parking, environmental management and visitor satisfaction.

**11.63** The complex and contentious nature of issues in Cheddar Gorge led to the Cheddar Transport Study being broadened to include a more thorough examination of economic and environmental issues. The report of that study, ("Cheddar Gorge and Village Economic and Environmental Appraisal", LUC, December 1999) includes recommendations on public transport, traffic management, access/parking, land management, enhancement of the built environment, visitor management, promoting existing/new activities, developing attractions, administration/marketing and local consultation. One recommendation of the study is a proposal for a Park and Ride car park but the study also acknowledges that efforts to promote a more effective and permanent Park and Ride may fail, in which case other alternatives will need to be reconsidered.

**11.64** The possibility of creating a three-deck multi-storey car park at the existing Cliff Street car park was rejected in the study because this would provide only an additional 300 spaces, was not favoured in opinion surveys and would have a high capital cost. The District Council consider that a well-designed multi-storey car park at this site would be preferable to the Garston Farm or Lippiatt sites. The site has the clear advantage of being located at a key entry point where there would be an opportunity to provide improved facilities, not only for motorists, but also for coach and bus users by including toilets and a visitor reception centre. Such a scheme would require major capital investment and is only likely to be considered for funding as a component of a strategy, which was enhancing the overall gorge environment by reducing traffic and replacing some or all of the existing parking in the gorge. As a three-deck car park this site could only provide a net increase of around 300 spaces. This would

clearly not be sufficient to directly replace the existing 358 spaces in the middle gorge area or allow for the potential increases in demand arising from longer stay or increased numbers of visitors.

- 11.65** Consideration of individual commercial development proposals in Cheddar Gorge will be considered against the framework set by Policy RLT14 and other policies in the Local Plan (Built Environment, Shopping (see Policy SH13) Transport, Countryside and Natural Environment) and the Cheddar Gorge Design Guide.

### Hotels, Motels and Similar Accommodation

- 11.66** The application of the principles set out in PPG13 would steer additional major tourist accommodation towards urban areas and seek accessibility by a choice of means of transport. The locations identified at item a) of RLT15, fully comply with this guidance, the other locations specified at items b), c) and d) are considered to be acceptable for the reasons set out below:
- b) Motorway Service Areas - despite a rural location and a largely car-based market (some customers could be coach-travellers) it is considered unreasonable to obstruct the potential for motorway travellers to have direct access to accommodation;
  - c) suitable existing buildings located near a main road (either within villages or possibly outside a defined development boundary) have the potential, within a known tourist area, of meeting the needs/preferences of visitors. Such locations are potentially accessed, not only by car, but also by bus or coach; and
  - d) as a matter of principle the Council consider that if an existing holiday site operator wishes to invest in a higher standard of accommodation, this a development that Local Plan policy would support. Particularly if this brings opportunities to improve landscaping, design and the overall image of the holiday area at Brean and Berrow.

#### **POLICY RLT15**

**A proposal for a new or extended hotel, motel or similar tourist accommodation will only be permitted if:**

- a) **it is within Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea, Highbridge or Cheddar; or**

- b) **it is at a motorway service area; or**
- c) **it involves conversion and/or extension of a suitable existing building with good access to the main road network (A38, A39, A361, A370, A371 or A372); or**
- d) **it replaces existing static caravan or chalet accommodation at an established holiday site.**

### Farm-Based Tourist Accommodation

- 11.67** Farmhouse bed and breakfast or farm-based holiday accommodation can make good use of otherwise unused farm buildings and help sustain individual farm businesses and local employment in rural areas. A proliferation of tourist development in sensitive locations is not desirable, but small scale farm diversification proposals represent a good opportunity to provide new accommodation unobtrusively. With care it should be possible for such developments to not only have no adverse impact on the landscape but also have the positive advantage of helping develop and sustain "green tourism" - offering visitors close contact with local culture, produce, heritage and environment and the ability to discover and enjoy an area more intimately.
- 11.68** Proposals for the development of farm-based tourist accommodation will be considered against Policy E8 (Farm Diversification), and Policy CNE3 (Conversion of Rural Buildings). The use of existing buildings will generally be favoured under the terms of the Policy on the conversion of buildings in the countryside (which may allow holiday accommodation where permanent residential use would not be acceptable). If new buildings are proposed they should be sited and designed in such a way as to integrate with existing building groups and local landscape features (topography, trees and hedgerows in particular). Static caravans, chalet or cabin developments may be acceptable, but only if the proposal is for a small number of units, the management of which remains ancillary to the farm business (see Policy RLT16). Providing a site for camping or touring caravans may also be acceptable (see Policy RLT17). Proposals that would be unacceptably prominent in the landscape will be rejected under the provisions of Policies CNE1 or CNE2.

**11.69** Planning permission will include conditions to limit the individual occupancy of holiday accommodation and to prevent a subsequent change of use to permanent residential use.

### Static Caravans Holiday Chalets or Cabins

**11.70** Static caravans and chalets already comprise a major part of the County's stock of tourist accommodation and there is a particular concentration in Sedgemoor's coastal strip at Brean, Berrow and Burnham-on-Sea. The quantity and quality of tourist accommodation is largely derived from the operation of market forces, but whilst static caravan sites and chalets provide affordable holidays there is also widespread concern about their landscape impact. This is a particular issue at Brean and Berrow, which has one of the largest concentrations of caravan sites in the country. Some of the particular circumstances of Brean and Berrow are addressed separately in Policy RLT 18. Elsewhere in the District, new development will be subject of strict control with the intention of avoiding adverse affects to the local landscape. In addition to landscape impacts, regard must also be had to matters such as nature conservation sites and flood risk; relevant policies on all these matters are set out in Chapter 8.

#### **POLICY RLT16**

**Planning permission for new static caravan sites, holiday chalet or holiday cabin developments will only be granted in the following circumstances:**

- a) **the proposal is for a small number of units which are sited unobtrusively i.e. on a site which is well screened from public view by existing trees, hedgerows or buildings and where the proposal would not harm the character or appearance of the countryside; or**
- b) **as part of a comprehensive proposal for upgrading an established holiday site.**

**In all cases the local highway network must be capable of safely accommodating the traffic generated. Visitors should ideally be able to access the site by bus, on foot or by cycle and there should be adequate sewage disposal facilities.**

**Within the parishes of Brean and Berrow the additional provisions of Policy RLT18 will also apply.**

### Camping and Touring Caravan Sites

**11.71** Camping and caravanning are a significant element of the British holiday market. Many small scale sites do not require planning permission (Caravan Club etc certification) and many other sites operate as a short-term temporary use of land which again does not require planning permission. This Policy will therefore not be applicable in all circumstances.

**11.72** There is a substantial concentration of existing touring caravan and camping sites in the coastal strip at Brean and Berrow, a location which is also host to many static caravan and chalet sites. Whilst it can be argued this coastal area meets demands that would otherwise be putting pressure on more sensitive landscapes, such as the Heritage Coast or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the intensity of holiday sites in this coastal area has despoiled the landscape. This issue is raised separately elsewhere in this Local Plan and is likely to be subject of a separate long-term enhancement strategy. New or extended sites at Brean and Berrow are unlikely to be acceptable except as part of a comprehensive proposal where site operators are proposing significant edge-of-site landscaping and internal amenity improvements for the whole of an existing holiday site (including static caravans).

**11.73** There are also major touring caravan and camping sites elsewhere in the District, notably at Edithmead (near M5 junction 22), Cheddar and Fiddington. Any proposals for expansion of these sites or other existing sites will be assessed against this policy.

**11.74** Narrow country lanes found in many parts of the District are not particularly suitable for towing caravans and this could be a major limiting factor, particularly in and around the Quantock Hills, where the lanes often become steep and/or 'sunken', with limited passing places.

#### **POLICY RLT17**

**Planning permission for the development of a camping and/or touring caravan site (including proposals to extend an existing site) will not be granted unless:**

- a) **the site is well screened from public view by existing trees, hedgerows or buildings and the proposal would not harm the character or appearance of the countryside;**

- b) **traffic generated by the proposal can be safely accommodated on the local highway network; and**
- c) **adequate drinking water, toilet, shower and washing facilities are provided.**

**Visitors should ideally be able to access the site by bus, on foot or by cycle. Within the parishes of Brean and Berrow the additional provisions of Policy RLT18 will also apply.**

### **Improvement of Existing Holiday Sites, Brean and Berrow**

**11.75** The coastal area at Brean and Berrow has a massive concentration of holiday accommodation in chalets, static caravans and sites for touring caravans and camping. It is reputedly the second largest such concentration in the country and accommodates approximately 25-30,000 visitors at peak season.

**11.76** The wide sandy beaches and sand dunes that underpin the attraction of this location as a holiday destination, are also environments of recognised nature conservation importance. Water supply and sewerage infrastructure in the area was improved in the 1970s. Sections of the Coast Road at Brean have been improved in stages over the past three decades, but the road network feeding into the area from Weston-Super-Mare and the M5 remains largely unimproved.

**11.77** In the context of modern planning policies which seek to protect England's stretches of "undeveloped coastline", it can be difficult to imagine how development on this scale was allowed. The most significant damage to the natural landscape was done in the 1920s and 30s, when a mix of residential plots and holiday uses started to colonise the narrow belt of sand dunes at Brean. These uses gradually spread and the precedent set in an era before there was any planning control has been difficult to resist in subsequent years. Camping uses on farmland on the east side of the Coast Road had similarly small-scale beginnings, but a post-war holiday camp has been joined by several massive caravan sites.

Despite a general policy of containment, several of the farm-based caravan sites have expanded considerably since the 1960s. Many of the other caravan sites, particularly those in the dunes, are totally confined by property boundaries and

cannot expand. Many of the sites are simply fields filled with the maximum number of units which can be accommodated, laid out in regimented rows and devoid of the tree planting which could produce a more attractive site and help foil the site's impact on the local landscape. This visual impact is evident from many public vantage points - the coast road, footpaths and bridleways and from Brean Down. How these existing problems might be remedied is addressed below, but the main message for the control of new sites is that the Council wants much greater care to be taken to avoid adversely affecting the local landscape.

**11.78** The Council's view is that there is a need for a framework for long-term change at Brean and Berrow. Our starting point is:

- a) the area's infrastructure cannot cope with any significant increase of current peak demands;
- b) existing development has adversely affected the local landscape and in particular the views from the public highway and from Brean Down; and
- c) there needs to be sufficient flexibility to allow and indeed encourage, existing site operators to improve their holiday sites in response to rising expectations amongst visitors, the standards of competitors and the availability of better equipped caravans and holiday cabins.

There is evidence that the aspirations of many site operators and their customers, are consistent with and complementary to the broader aim of softening the visual impact of these sites in the landscape and improving the environment, both for visitors and residents. Previous policies in the Burnham-on-Sea Area Local Plan set a basically restrictive framework, but also included sufficient flexibility to encourage the upgrading of existing holiday sites. Several major sites have subsequently invested in amenity blocks, fishing lakes, tree planting and other site improvements.

**11.79** In the long term the Council consider it is in the best interests of the area's attractiveness and viability to:

- a) seek to negotiate the removal of those existing caravan sites which adversely affect the approach road to Brean Down;

- b) establish a major tree planting programme to provide screening, more attractive site environments and the capacity for expansion or relocation of some existing sites; and
- c) facilitate the improvement of existing caravan sites (better landscaping, more amenity space, improved site facilities, a reorganisation to accommodate larger static caravans or replacement with holiday cabins, the replacement of touring caravans with static caravans or providing a replacement site which enables relocation of an existing intrusive facility) by allowing additional land to be used only in those circumstances.

Development on existing or extended sites will require sensitive edge-of-site landscaping and will only be acceptable under this policy in order to achieve a general upgrading of a site enhancement of the quality of accommodation and other on-site facilities provided for holidaymakers.

### **POLICY RLT18**

**Planning permission for additional land at Brean and Berrow to be developed for holiday accommodation (camp site, caravan site, chalets, cabins or similar) will only be permitted subject to all of the following criteria:**

- a) **the land is required in order to allow upgrading, reorganisation or relocation of an existing caravan site (to accommodate larger units, more amenity space and better landscaping);**
- b) **there is no net increase in the total number of units of accommodation;**
- c) **the scheme provides for substantial tree planting and/or other landscaping at both the existing and the new site in order to screen the site from publicly accessible vantage points and to enhance the character and appearance of the area; and**
- d) **the land is not within the area affected by Policy CNE4 (Coastal Edge and Brean Down Strategic Gap).**

### **Safeguarding existing holiday sites at Burnham-on-Sea, Berrow and Brean**

**11.80** In view of Burnham-on-Sea's role as a Resort Town the Council considers that the continued availability of holiday accommodation within easy reach of the beaches and town centre should be an important consideration in deciding the pattern of future development. The previous Local Plan recognised that existing holiday sites located within the urban area, particularly caravan and chalet parks, may become subject to pressure for residential development and had a policy that sought to resist this (Burnham-on-Sea Local Plan, Policy BH/TO5). The fact that such sites are inevitably identified in the urban capacity study, as at least having potential to accommodate new housing development, gives continuing cause for a clear local planning policy aimed at retaining existing holiday accommodation sites.

**11.81** There are also substantial chalet and static sites in the Berrow and Brean area that could be regarded as brownfield sites. However, these sites are generally outside the defined village development boundaries and therefore, Policies STR3 and STR4 justifiably restrict their development potential. Individual sites vary in scale from less than 0.5 hectares to over 10 hectares but the redevelopment of sites of any size will be resisted for both:

- a) settlement strategy reasons, and
- b) in order to maintain a stock of seaside holiday accommodation (and limit the potential pressure for additional greenfield land to be used for this purpose).

### **POLICY RLT20**

**Planning permission for proposals that would result in the loss of existing holiday accommodation sites in Burnham-on-Sea will not be granted unless:**

- a) **The proposed development is for the provision of improved holiday accommodation or leisure / entertainment facilities, or**
- b) **There is no longer a continuing need for the type of accommodation provided and neither the existing accommodation nor an alternative form of holiday accommodation would be viable.**