

## **Neighbourhood Plan: Countryside Policy**

*(evidence?)*

***Introduction: Wheathampstead is a large Parish, comprising an historic village centre surrounded by green belt and a number of relatively small settlements. This policy is intended to preserve and enhance the surrounding countryside in terms of the environment, its visual amenity & access for all. All development in the Parish should respect the character and appearance of the surrounding area and the principles of sustainable development.***

### **1. Green Belt:**

- a. Preserve as much as possible, despite pressure to release for housing & development.
- b. Resist and expansion of small settlements surrounded by the green belt such as the Folly, Lea Valley Estate, and Amwell.

### **2. Open Spaces:**

*The Parish is responsible for a number of open spaces, including Nomansland Common (managed by a joint committee with Sandridge Parish Council), the Butterfield Nature Reserve and adjacent playing field, Rectory Field and Copse, East Meads by the River Lea, and common land at Gustard Wood, Melissa Field, Marshalls Heath and Bower Heath. In consultation with Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and the Countryside Management Service (CMS), these areas are currently being maintained by the Parish Council with support from local community volunteers and appointed rangers who oversee and keep a general watch on any issues arising.*

- a. Maintain and improve Parish-owned open spaces, with a priority on rare habitats such as acid heathland. Areas of ecological importance should be protected and expanded or improved where possible. *(Management plans of rangers & WOSV)*
- b. Improve signage and public information about the open spaces to sustain support for their preservation and maintenance, keeping a consistent and appropriate design of information boards. *(Heritage Trail, WDPS signage policy)*
- c. Nomansland ....
- d. Encourage biodiversity & wildlife. *(HMWT, CMS)*
- e. Ensure adequate disabled/mobility access wherever possible. *(HCC policy?)*
- f. Make provision for the acquisition of more open spaces if the opportunity arises, e.g. grassland to north of Mid-Herts Golf Club (opposite former Tin Pot).

### **3. Agricultural land:**

- a. Preserve the rural character of the areas surrounding the village centre.
- b. Oppose the loss of agricultural land to development whilst encouraging the re-use of redundant or under-utilised buildings for small businesses.

4. **Forestry & Woodlands:**
  - a. Support the continuing development of Heartwood Forest. (*?Woodland Trust; but isn't it all outside our boundary?*)
5. **Rural businesses:**
  - a. Promote the local economy through encouragement of rural businesses. (*WEB*)
  - b. Preserve existing Pubs through the appropriate use of ACV status. (*CAMRA*)
6. **Blackbridge Tip:**
  - a. Continue to support the Tripartite Agreement between the landowners (LaFarge, HCC and SADC), which precludes re-opening of this site for waste dumping in perpetuity.
  - b. Press LaFarge to restore the verge across the abandoned access road off the bypass, in order to discourage littering.
  - c. Explore options for improving the visual appearance of the site. (*WDPS??*)
7. **Rural Heritage:**
  - a. Maintain a good network of accessible footpaths to encourage residents and visitors into the countryside. (*CPRE, Heritage Trail; consult Eddie Cornell*)
  - b. Promote local tourism by developing Devil's Dyke as an historic attraction, improving access to this and the rest of the site at the Slad (*English Heritage, SADC museum, landowner?*)
8. **The River Lea:**
  - a. This is a major asset to the Parish, and we should continue to work with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and local volunteers to maximise water quality, preserve the ecology of the river, improve biodiversity, and increase public access where the opportunity arises and is appropriate. (*HMWT, EA, Patrick McNiell*)
9. **Access:**
  - a. Ensure the Parish footpath network is kept on good order. (*PC footpath maps, Heritage Trail II, Eddie Cornell, Ramblers Association, local walking groups?*)
  - b. Keep bridleways accessible. (*British Horse Society*)
  - c. Encourage cycleways (see transport policy).

Notes:

Would it be useful to consult significant local landowners such as Titmuss & Niall-Cain?