

Bury Unitary Development Plan

STRATEGIC PLANNING BACKGROUND

The strategy for the Plan has been prepared in the context of national planning guidance as expressed through Government legislation, various Circulars and Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPG's).

More particularly, however, in developing an overall Strategy for Bury's UDP, account has been taken of the advice contained in the Secretary of State's "Strategic Guidance for Greater Manchester". In putting forward a strategy for Bury's UDP, it has been recognised that it is important to ensure that the various elements of the Plan not only compliment each other, but that they also compliment the sub-regional context of Greater Manchester as a whole.

The County-wide overview provided by Strategic Guidance covers five main topic areas which can be summarised as follows: -

Economic Development and Urban Regeneration - revitalising the sub-regional economy in general and promoting urban regeneration in particular are seen as key objectives for Greater Manchester.

Housing - meeting a basic minimum requirement of 60,000 new dwellings in Greater Manchester between mid-1986 and mid-2001 with an inter-district split giving Bury a minimum dwelling requirement of 4,000 units * plus replacement of cleared dwellings.

Green Belt, Open Land and Environmental Quality - incorporating existing Green Belt should be sought, along with accommodation of farming needs, continuing care for the river valleys and open land of the County, and protection of areas of ecological importance. The Minerals Local Plan for Greater Manchester will continue to provide the framework for minerals planning within the County and site selection for waste disposal should have regard to the Waste Disposal Plans for the area.

Town Centres and Shopping - Greater Manchester's town centres should continue to be the main focus for the provision of shopping facilities and the role of Manchester as the regional centre maintained.

Transport - the present system needs to be maintained and selectively improved to aid the area's overall economic and environmental well-being. It needs to be ensured that the public transport network continues to meet peak hour travel demands, and allowance should be made for proposed modifications to the existing motorway and trunk road network.

STRATEGY

The key issues already described have highlighted the essential need for any strategy for the UDP to, first and foremost, set out to achieve a balance between accommodating development pressures and protecting environmental interests. The Strategy which it is intended to pursue through the UDP therefore aims to steer a course which is sustainable in the long term and will guide and control the development of the Borough throughout the 1990's and into the next century in the best interests of the whole community.

Key Directions

In seeking to balance competing demands and pressures four broad aims or key directions for the UDP have been identified: -

KEY DIRECTION 1 - To promote the future development of the Borough in accordance with the framework laid down by the Secretary of State in "Strategic Guidance for Greater Manchester".

KEY DIRECTION 2 - To enhance the prosperity of the Borough and its residents and aid the development of a strong local economy.

KEY DIRECTION 3 - To protect and enhance those aspects of the Borough which are vital to the quality of life enjoyed by local residents and visitors to the Borough.

KEY DIRECTION 4 - To encourage development which will foster a positive identity and image for the Borough and its constituent districts, and in so doing provide a common sense of purpose for the actions of all parties with an interest in the well-being of the Borough and its communities.

These four key directions are to be pursued through the Strategy for the UDP by aiming to build on the Borough's strengths whilst at the same time being aware of the constraints imposed by the Borough's weaknesses or disadvantages and the need to try to eliminate them.

Strengths and Weaknesses

In comparison with many neighbouring districts, Bury is seen to be a relatively prosperous area, although this is not to overlook some pockets of disadvantage which give cause for concern in parts of the inner areas and on some Council estates. This relative prosperity can be seen in the Borough's above average representation of the higher socio-economic groups, good housing, low unemployment, pleasant environment, good education facilities and limited social problems. These factors are further reflected in the fact that the Borough does not qualify for many of the Government grants and assistance given to neighbouring districts.

In some instances the lack of Government assistance has proved to be an obstacle to attracting investment. However, if the Borough is not to allow itself to be disadvantaged by its lack of Government assistance, then one of the fundamental strands of any strategy for the future development of the Borough must be to turn what at first may appear to be a disadvantage into an advantage. The relative prosperity of the Borough and its other qualities must be used and stressed as strengths of the Borough, which can in turn help to project a positive image of the area and thus help to create a climate capable of attracting investment and bringing about improvements, independent of the type of assistance available in neighbouring districts.

The Strategy, therefore, takes Bury's position as an "island" of relative prosperity within the north Manchester/south-east Lancashire area and, using this major strength, suggests that the future development of the Borough should be geared to carving out a role for Bury as an important commercial and service centre, as well as a major leisure area for the region. Such a role would be seen to be building on recent trends and developments with regard to the expansion of the service sector and the growth of leisure/tourism activities. Although the UDP is primarily a land use plan, it can play a significant part in establishing such a role for Bury, and the Strategy outlined demonstrates how this can be achieved. The Strategy hopes to strike a

balance between the need for development and the desire to improve the quality of life and environment offered by the Borough. It is not concerned with development "at any cost".

It is considered that this approach is entirely consistent with how the Borough can best contribute to the Strategic Guidance objectives of revitalising the Greater Manchester economy and promoting urban regeneration. Objectives which are also considered to be wholly in line with the concept of promoting sustainable development.

Strategy Details

The Strategy focuses on a series of key policy areas under which proposed future policy directions are explained, together with the benefits which will hopefully flow from adopting the approach put forward.

The main elements of the Strategy to be pursued are as follows: -

Strengthening the Local Economy

- Industrial and commercial development will be encouraged in appropriate locations to diversify and strengthen the local economy where possible.
- Office developments will be encouraged and will normally be located in or adjacent to town centres, commercial areas or on purpose built business parks providing a high quality environment.
- Land for industry and business use will generally be on appropriate sites within the existing urban area. Land supplies will be governed by environmental and other policies of the Plan, particularly in relation to the protection of open land.
- Provision will be made to maintain and protect existing sources of employment. Major well-established industrial and business areas will be identified and within them change of use to non-industrial use will normally be resisted.
- Regeneration and revitalisation of older and outworn industrial areas will be encouraged.
- The economic benefits to be derived from the Borough's existing and future transportation network will be maximised where compatible with other policies of the Plan.

There will be a dual thrust to the policies for the local economy.

Firstly, policies will aim to strengthen and diversify the local economy by concentrating on the attraction of good quality jobs i.e. skilled, well paid jobs in the business, office and service sectors, together with appropriate jobs in manufacturing.

Secondly, it will be equally important to make provision for existing employers to modernise and expand, and also to continue with existing initiatives to bring about the revitalisation and improvement of older industrial areas. This will be vital if the Borough is not to lose growing industries and if it is to project a positive image as a Borough of modern industrial efficiency.

The UDP can play an important role in the success of this approach by helping to overcome any remnants of a negative image which Bury may still have as a northern industrial town, and also by identifying and setting policies which bring forward high

quality, prestige sites capable of attracting business and commercial uses appropriate to the aims of the strategy.

In identifying sites it will be important for the UDP to ensure that the quality of the local environment, seen as one of the Borough's most valuable assets, is not adversely affected. Particular emphasis will be placed on town centre sites, especially for offices, and on sites within the existing urban area with the potential to provide "parkland" settings for prestige business and modern manufacturing developments, where advantage of existing and planned infrastructure can be maximised, e.g. access to the motorway network and proximity to Metrolink stations.

This approach addresses Bury's perceived problem of a shortage of industrial land in a positive manner by maximising the use of the limited supply available and minimising the need for intrusions into valuable open land. The approach also holds out the prospect of developing a broader base to the local economy. If successful, it will bring a higher ratio of job provision to land area, unlike job provision in distribution, warehousing and some retailing and leisure developments, where investment has been considerable in the past but job creation has been limited.

The quality of job provision should be higher and hence more robust in times of recession and more appropriate to the population profile of Bury with its bias towards the higher socio-economic groups.

By bringing such jobs into the urban areas and particularly the town centres, be it on vacant land or by redevelopment, it is hoped that additional spin-off benefits generated for other businesses, such as shops, banks, service suppliers, pubs and restaurants etc., will be retained within the Borough and bring a much needed boost to the local economy, especially in the Borough's town centres.

Job provision in the urban area, associated with the improvement and revitalisation of the older manufacturing areas, also offers the best prospects for alleviating the persistent pockets of higher unemployment found in the Borough's inner areas.

Provision of Housing

- Provision will be made for a minimum of 4,000 ¹
- Net additional dwellings over the period 1986-2001 on sites already identified or on sites which come forward within the urban area.
- Land for housing will cater for a range of market requirements including smaller units and schemes for low cost or rented housing.
- New housing development will not be allowed to prejudice the quality of the environment through over development or loss of valuable amenity or recreational open space.
- Initiatives will be undertaken to regenerate and enhance the condition of housing and the residential environment of older housing areas.

Since the late 1960's Bury has been an area of substantial residential development drawing population in the main from the inner parts of the conurbation to the fringes. Strategic Guidance is now placing a greater emphasis on the retention of population within the inner areas and if this policy is to be successful then fringe development needs to be restricted.

¹ See footnote at the end of this Section.

In pursuit of this policy, Strategic Guidance has been specific in setting levels for new house building in all Greater Manchester districts and in the case of Bury a minimum requirement for 4,000² new dwellings between 1986 and 2001 has been set.

Current evidence on housing land availability in Bury suggests that the 4,000² minimum dwelling requirement, together with provision for clearance, can be met from existing commitments. It is, therefore, unlikely to be necessary for the UDP to allocate any further land for housing above that already committed or identified in existing plans or likely to come forward from "windfall" sites to meet Strategic Guidance requirements. Against this background the UDP will be able to adopt a strong position in protecting valuable open land from residential development. Also, in the urban area, the UDP will be looking to resist development where inappropriate, for example, where valuable recreational space or important amenity areas would be lost to development.

In addition, it is recognised that housing conditions play a major part in the quality of life enjoyed by the Borough's residents. The UDP will be concerned to ensure that the quality and use of the existing housing stock is improved wherever possible.

Particular attention will be paid to encouraging housing improvement and urban renewal initiatives as a vital element in bringing about urban regeneration and improvement of older inner areas.

Encouraging variety in housing types and tenure will also be important in tailoring the housing stock to the needs of the local population and people moving into the area. In particular, the provision of affordable housing and special needs housing will need to be considered.

By limiting new house building in Bury, the Borough will be making an important contribution to the urban regeneration objectives for Greater Manchester as a whole. Restricting "green field" development in areas like Bury will hopefully encourage more development to take place within the inner areas of the conurbation. At the same time the fringe areas of boroughs like Bury will benefit in environmental terms with a reduced loss of open land.

The emphasis on encouraging housing improvements and neighbourhood renewal initiatives will bring obvious benefits in terms of improved conditions and a better quality of life for the people affected. Such initiatives will also bring cumulative benefits to the Borough as a whole through a better quality housing stock and an enhanced urban environment, thus helping to project a better image of the area, which in turn will help to attract investment.

Enhancement of the Local Environment

- Conservation and improvement of the local environment throughout the Borough will be a prime consideration in all matters involving the use and development of land and buildings.
- Development will not normally be permitted which would result in an unacceptable detrimental effect on the environment through any form of pollution, nuisance or hazard.
- The Council will endeavour to safeguard and enhance areas, sites and buildings of historical, architectural, scientific, ecological or archaeological value.

² See footnote at the end of this Section

- The conservation, enhancement and management of sites of wildlife and nature conservation importance will be promoted and sites linked whenever possible to form wildlife corridors leading to the open countryside.
- The reclamation and beneficial use of derelict land will be encouraged.

The quality of the environment within the Borough is of fundamental importance, not only to the quality of life of its residents, but also in respect of Bury's image to potential investors and visitors. The Council has already adopted an Environmental Principles Statement which sets out its aims on factors affecting the environment and includes the Council's guiding principles with regard to the use of land. These principles form the basis of the policy aims described above to improve the local environment and control the use of land.

Much has been done in the past to bring about improvements to the local environment with such initiatives as the Croal Irwell Valley Local Plan, housing and industrial area improvements and derelict land reclamation.

With increasing public interest in environmental matters, together with the reliance now being placed on the environmental qualities of Bury as part of the strategy to attract investment, jobs and tourists, and improve the quality of life for people living and working in the area, it will be vital that the local environment continues to be protected and further enhanced. A continuing programme of environmental improvements will also, in its own capacity, bring investment and jobs to the Borough, for example, through possible developments like the "Community Forest" initiative.

The UDP will have a vital role to play in giving a renewed and stronger emphasis to environmental and ecological matters, strengthening the conservation of both the built and natural environment and promoting the concept of sustainable development. Policies will need to be particularly concerned with conserving aspects of value, initiating further improvements, controlling new development and encouraging better quality and design.

The benefits of a good quality environment will not just be confined to improving the Borough's image and helping to attract investment and visitors. With the increased awareness and concern for "green issues" there are good reasons for the UDP to take a strong environmental line to demonstrate that the Council shares the public's concern for the environment. A firm and positive commitment to the care of the local environment through the UDP will be an important element in helping to demonstrate the Council's commitment to the environment and "green issues" in general.

Protection of Open Land

- The permanence and integrity of the Green Belt will be safeguarded. Any alteration to its boundary by the UDP will only be proposed in exceptional circumstances and to the minimum degree required.
- Positive management of the countryside, including the river valleys will be promoted to integrate the rural economy with leisure and tourism, nature conservation and landscape enhancement.
- Open spaces within the urban area with existing or potential value as leisure, amenity or habitat areas will be protected and enhanced whenever possible.

The substantial areas of open land within the Borough have long been the target of developers and large areas have been developed, particularly since the 1960's for housing. The resultant semi-rural residential areas have proved popular with commuters and migrants from Manchester and Salford, although the danger that development could go too far has been recognised in recent years by the drawing of a tight Green Belt around the Borough to restrict further peripheral development.

In looking ahead to the end of the Plan period and beyond, the UDP will need to recognise that the balance between urban and open land is now at a very critical point and that maintaining the correct balance will be a vital component in achieving the environmental objectives of the Plan. It is the open land within the Borough which contributes much to the environmental quality of the area. It is also the open land, especially in the Irwell Valley and the moorland fringes, which is at the heart of the Borough's tourism drive and it is the operation of green belt policies over much of the Borough's open land which maintains the separate identity of Bury from its neighbouring districts and protects the character of settlements within the Borough.

For the reasons described above, and also to further the wider objective of Strategic Guidance to bring about urban regeneration by restricting fringe development, the UDP approach will be concerned to continue, wherever possible, the strong protection of open land. At the same time, the UDP will also be concerned to promote the positive use and management of open land to achieve a multi-functional countryside satisfying nature conservation, recreation and access, landscape, pollution control and rural economy interests.

The pressures for development on open land are likely to arise from three main sources - housing, out-of-town retailing and industry. From the residential point of view it is considered that existing commitments will cover the net dwelling requirement of 4,000³ given in Strategic Guidance and that, therefore, there will be no substantial need to release further open land for housing in the UDP period. From the retailing point of view the strategy itself places considerable emphasis on the need to maintain the vitality and viability of existing town centres and, therefore, it will be important that shopping development is concentrated in and around existing centres, and that out-of-centre developments on open land are discouraged.

From the economic point of view, pressures on open land in the past have come mainly from the distribution, retail and wholesale industries with their demands for sites linked to the motorway network. Such pressures are likely to continue in the future as the motorway network develops, but the UDP intends to adopt a more selective approach to future job creation with an emphasis on sites within the urban area. If any further open land release for industry is to be considered in the future, it will only be where a specialist need would be met which could not be met elsewhere and major strategic benefits would accrue to outweigh the loss of open land.

The Strategy outlined, together with the strong protection of open land in Bury, will make a positive contribution to urban regeneration in the County as a whole. Particularly as Bury has by tradition become an area on the fringe of the conurbation which has drawn population and development from the core areas in the past. At a local level the strong protection of open land will also act to complement positive development proposals and bring about regeneration within the urban areas of the Borough.

³ See footnote at the end of this Section

Improvement of Town Centres and Shopping Provision

- The existing pattern of shopping centres will be retained and whenever possible their environment and facilities enhanced. In particular, the sub-regional centre of Bury will be the focus of measures to improve its attractiveness and viability.
- Unless specifically to serve a local need or particular requirements, new shopping will normally be located in or adjacent to existing centres and be appropriate in scale to the area served, taking account of deficiencies in existing provision.

Shopping provision and the well-being of the Borough's town centres are closely inter-dependent. Bury town centre, as a sub-regional centre, suffers from the competition of its larger neighbours, particularly the regional centre of Manchester, along with Bolton and to a lesser extent Rochdale. The other town centres of the Borough act largely as local centres as far as shopping provision is concerned, but are important to the communities they serve, and most are in need of improvement to increase their attractiveness.

The UDP will be concerned to explore and make provision for improvements within the Borough's various centres.

In the case of Bury Town Centre, the UDP will be looking to improve and expand durable shopping provision to take advantage of expected growth in durable expenditure anticipated during the 1990's. The degree to which this can be achieved will determine whether Bury can retain, or indeed, increase its market share in competition with neighbouring centres. The emphasis on creating town centre jobs and improving the environment will reinforce the attractiveness of the centre and improve investment viability.

In encouraging shopping development within and adjacent to existing centres, the UDP will be looking to control out-of-centre retailing development within strict parameters.

Improvement and development of the Borough's town centres, and particularly Bury Town Centre, is seen as one of the main objectives of the UDP Strategy. Shopping provision will be a key element, but it will be the combination of initiatives, together with transport and highways improvements, which the UDP will bring together, that will have the greatest impact, setting in motion a cycle of mutually self-supporting actions and developments and leading the way to a more sustainable pattern of development.

Highways and Transportation Provision

- The effective and efficient operation of public transport will be facilitated and, in particular, the benefits derived from the introduction of Metrolink, as part of a balanced transportation strategy, will be maximised.
- The safety, convenience and mobility of pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users will be promoted.
- The location and density of new development will be influenced in order to optimise the use of the transportation infrastructure.
- Highway improvements and other measures will be promoted to alleviate the detrimental effects of heavy trafficking on the Borough's roads.

- Measures to minimise the environmental impact of traffic will be promoted by supporting Metrolink, traffic minimisation measures and a balanced transportation strategy.

The Council has adopted a policy of supporting a balanced transportation strategy, where the various elements and modes of movement are fully integrated and balanced to meet the differing needs within the community.

The role of the UDP in promoting a balanced transportation strategy will be limited by the nature of the Plan, being primarily a land-use plan, but nevertheless the UDP can make an important contribution in a number of directions as set out above.

The emphasis will be on developing Bury and centres along Metrolink as public transport focal points. Highway improvements and transportation provision will also have an important role to play in demonstrating commitment to improving the attractiveness of the Borough's centres. There is a need to adopt a "greener" approach which gives more consideration to the environmental impact of traffic and greater priority to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users, as well as improving conditions for motor vehicle users. The objective must be to make local centres, in particular, more "user friendly". It needs to be accepted that we cannot carry on planning for an ever increasing volume of vehicular traffic and that a "balanced approach" to transportation will become increasingly necessary in the future.

Improved accessibility and a modern public transport system based on Metrolink will also complement the basis of the economy policies i.e. that Bury has the potential to attract quality business, office and service sector jobs. Metrolink, in particular, reinforces the case for jobs to be created in the Borough's town centre areas where workers can take advantage of the new transport system. Local highway improvement schemes in town centres will also stimulate improvements and open up development opportunities.

Provision for Leisure and Tourism

- A wide range of well designed sports, leisure and entertainment facilities will be promoted and safeguarded in accessible and otherwise suitable locations to meet the needs of all residents and visitors to the Borough.
- The Council will seek to retain and enhance open space provision which provides opportunity for formal sports, casual play and informal leisure.
- Public access to the countryside for informal leisure purposes will be maintained and expanded where possible.
- Development of hotel and conference facilities will be encouraged, particularly in Bury Town Centre, and provision of other tourist attractions will be supported in suitable locations.
- The development of arts and cultural facilities will be pursued throughout the Borough and particularly in Bury Town Centre.

It is recognised that a variety of accessible leisure facilities makes an important contribution to the quality of life in the Borough.

A number of leisure and tourism developments, which took place towards the end of the 1980's, have done much to add a new dimension to the Borough. Developments such as the Multiplex Cinema and Megabowl at Pilsworth, together with the opening of

the East Lancashire Railway and improvements in the Irwell Valley are providing facilities for local residents to enjoy and are also attracting significant numbers of visitors to the Borough.

The development of the Borough as a leisure/tourist area looks set to continue throughout the 1990's and into the next century as the East Lancashire Railway continues to expand and becomes firmly established as a major visitor attraction. Complementary developments and improvements are also playing a major role in building up the tourism package and doing much to revitalise and improve areas like the Upper Irwell Valley. Again it is the environmental quality of the Borough and particularly the improvements taking place in the Irwell Valley and the moorland fringes which are proving attractive to both visitors and local residents. Environmental quality must, therefore, be safeguarded and continue to be enhanced in an appropriate manner.

The UDP, in recognising the cycle of benefits which leisure and tourism development is bringing, will aim to promote and guide further improvements to maximise the benefits for the Borough as a whole. In particular, it is recognised that the town centre of Bury still lacks a central hotel/conference facility and would also benefit from a further broadening of its arts and cultural base to provide a full range of leisure opportunities.

The growth of tourism and leisure activities in the Borough is already bringing, and hopefully will continue to bring, substantial economic benefits to the Borough and complements well the aim of attracting quality jobs to the area. The developments and improvements which leisure and tourism in Bury are bringing are doing much to boost the image of the area. Leisure provision is also an important aspect of the quality of life enjoyed by local residents who will increasingly benefit from the improved leisure opportunities becoming available.

THE PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Strategy for the Plan has highlighted the fact that the UDP has a vital role to play in balancing the needs for economic prosperity and demands for development, against the growing concerns for the environment and protection of the Borough's character and identity.

The importance of achieving this balance can also be seen to be at the heart of the concept of "sustainable development".

Since the publication of "Bury 2001 - The Strategy for the Plan" there has been increasing recognition that the concept of sustainable development should be an important factor within the planning system. Recent PPG's have emphasised the Government's commitment to sustainable development and the role of the planning system in helping to achieve it. PPG12 "Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance" has made clear the Government's intention to ensure that "...the sum total of decisions in the planning field, as elsewhere, should not deny future generations the best of today's environment". The concept of sustainability is based upon restricting and controlling economic growth and development so that unacceptable irreversible damage to the environment does not result. However, it recognises that some level of economic growth and development is essential to ensure acceptable social and environmental conditions. For without any development, existing conditions will deteriorate leading to equally unacceptable environmental degradation in terms of poor housing, endemic unemployment, low rates of return on capital and run-down public services. Therefore, development which respects environmental constraints - sustainable development - is to be encouraged and unsympathetic, unfettered development avoided.

Though the document "Bury 2001 - The Strategy for the Plan" (July 1991) did not make specific mention of the concept of sustainable development, its recognition that the UDP has a vital role to play in balancing the relationship between economic growth and development, and environmental protection, is entirely consistent with the principles of sustainable development. Indeed, the strategy which has been developed for the Bury UDP, and the resulting policies and proposals which now follow, are considered to be a step in the direction of encouraging and facilitating sustainable development. The Plan addresses the main issues which derive from the concept of sustainable development in a positive manner, and puts forward policies and proposals in the following sections which are considered to be in the best interests of the long term future of the Borough and future generations of its population, without placing unacceptable demands on the local environment.

FOOTNOTE:

* - It should be noted that the dwelling requirement for Bury of 4,000 dwellings set by Strategic Guidance for Greater Manchester has been superseded following the UDP Inspector's recommendation on future housing land provision and the Council's subsequent modifications to the "Housing" section of the Plan. See Housing Policy H1 for further details.