

SUSTAINABLE VALE ROYAL

Response to the draft District Plan

EDDISBURY GREEN PARTY

April 1987



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

'Sustainable Vale Royal' was written primarily as the Green Party's response to the Vale Royal draft Local Plan. As an exercise in working out policies for a sustainable society in a typical rural District, however, it may be of interest to a wider readership, and so has been published in this form. The main body of this document is as presented to Vale Royal District Council in April 1987, with the exception of this page, and the addition of details of the Green Party at the end.

Many who comment on the draft Plan have very specific interests, and tend to argue from these back to the issues and principles. We work in the opposite direction, establishing principles and then attempting to derive specific responses to the draft Plan.

There are two halves to the document. In the Introduction, we draw up basic ecological principles relevant to Vale Royal - and perhaps to many similar areas. Some are relevant to the County as well as the District level. The second half consists of specific proposals for altering the draft Plan, derived from these principles. With a few exceptions, notably the Transport section, most paragraphs in the second half can be read independently of each other. We do not attempt to suggest new wording for the Plan, but leave that to the expertise of the Planning Officers.

The Introduction, and as far as possible, the second part, has been written in such a way that it is not necessary to know the detailed contents of the draft Plan.

We trust you will find the document of interest, and would be very happy to receive your comments.

Eddisbury Green Party,
April 1987.

SUMMARY

The Vale Royal District Plan is designed to take us nearly into the Twenty-first Century. It is based on the District Philosophy published in 1975. But much has changed since then. We are moving into the post-industrial age, where we cannot rely on industrialism to give us the good life. People are becoming much more aware of the need to live in harmony with our environment, accepting it as a valid political and planning issue.

It is fitting therefore that in 1987, the European Year of the Environment, the Green Party should examine the very basis on which the Local Plan was written. We discuss at some length the things that should be aimed for as we move into a resource-limited age. The key is stewardship.

Since the District Plan is increasing in importance it ought to consider fundamental issues independently of the County Structure Plan. We suggest that the Local Plan should be compiled according to certain basic principles:

- the need to restore and maintain sustainable communities;
- our responsibility for some global problems;
- the need for environmentally-sensitive integration, rather than protectionism;
- the need for a new way of accounting, based on a new understanding of economics and employment.

This would lead to a more sustainable, robust and healthy Vale Royal, now and into the Twenty-first Century.

We identify some major characteristics of sustainable communities, and urge Vale Royal District Council to carry out a survey of all its communities - town and country alike - using these characteristics as attributes with which to measure the health and vitality of each. We also suggest that development should be spread around the whole District, in small environmentally-sensitive units, to revive rural communities. Such a policy is a direct reversal of the current policy of concentrating development in large chunks around Northwich and Winsford, but is the only realistic plan in the long run.

We urge Vale Royal District Council to take more seriously our share of global responsibility for pollution, resource depletion and the injustices in world trade. One area is oil consumption, unnecessarily high due to the high level of road transport. We argue that not only do we want to solve congestion problems, but Vale Royal District Council should actively aim instead to reduce the use of road transport. Another is energy, and we suggest that thermal efficiency of buildings should be explicitly considered in planning.

The usual answer to loss of wildlife habitats is to protect designated areas of ecological value. We argue that a much sounder policy, is to treat the whole countryside as environmentally sensitive, and thoughtfully integrate a wide variety of activities therein. Food production is not the only use for the countryside - with careful planning, industry, food production, woodland, housing and wildlife can live in harmony. But developments must be small and have regard for the local and global environment. Agriculture must become less intensive.

Unemployment is a big issue of today. But in a post-industrial, technological age, it is time to divorce the receiving of a basic income from the ability to get a paid job. The emphasis on jobs as a commodity to be provided is dangerous. We urge Vale Royal to adopt a new way of accounting.

Otherwise we and our children, will reap the high costs of division in society, a polluted world, scarce resources and alienation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

1. In its introduction the Vale Royal draft Local Plan summarises the District Philosophy of 1975

- concentration of development around Northwich and Winsford,
- elsewhere, small scale development directed at local needs,
- Green Belt to the North and West, and
- protection for rural and urban environments.

It then develops this further, in response to worsening economic conditions:

- emphasis on quality of development, and
- a little more housing and employment development in larger villages.

2. While we support the emphasis on small scale development, meeting local needs, quality and concern for the 'environment', we feel they do not go far enough as a basis to take us up to the end of the Twentieth Century and beyond. Also, there are more fundamental reasons than "worsening economic conditions" for allowing more flexibility in the villages - the need for sustainable communities; see below.

3. Many things have happened since 1975 that require more than a small shift in emphasis. Whereas in 1975 pressure groups were highlighting individual environmental problems, as Anthony Tucker¹ says, "The old environmental targets of clean air and water have been overtaken by public demands for a much broader and environmentally sensitive approach." The movement away from an industrial to a post-industrial society has gathered pace; people like Rod Hackney, the President elect of the RIBA, are using such terms with their full meaning now². There is a growing awareness that the current economic measures and aims, of economic growth, full employment and free trade are fundamentally flawed, and should be replaced by well-being, good work and self-reliance respectively; see Jobs and the New Economics, below.

4. We have now to look afresh at the underlying assumptions, and this is the purpose of this introduction. Though some is perhaps more suited to the County Structure Plan, it is appropriate to do so here, in view of the increasing importance being given to District Plans, relative to County Structure Plans - a change that has come about during the drawing up of this Local Plan.

5. We base many of our comments, explicitly and implicitly, on the World Conservation Strategy³, to which we refer the reader. Though it takes a rather utilitarian stance, this document provides both the intellectual framework and practical guidance on the conservation actions necessary for sustainable development, and is intended for development practitioners like the District Council. The Strategy demonstrates that conservation improves the prospects of sustainable development and proposes ways of integrating conservation into the development process.

6. The draft Plan speaks often of 'local need', but doesn't define it. There is therefore the danger that powerful lobbies will effectively define it for us, on an ad-hoc basis, to their own advantage. We suggest below the type of level at which 'local need' can be more rigorously defined.

7. In this Introduction we suggest that the Local Plan should be based on sustainable communities, a more global outlook, and environmentally-sensitive integration, especially in the countryside. Agriculture must become less intensive, and the Local Plan should recognise the influence that planning has on people's lives.

8. The normal attitude to environmental concerns displayed by politicians and economists is that they are "nice to have as long as we can afford it - but at present our priority is jobs and prosperity." This is self-defeating. The draft Plan is somewhat more enlightened, but still makes the environment rather secondary. We discuss at some length, therefore, a more wholesome view of jobs, trade and economic growth, which is more suited to a post-industrial society.

9. Part 1 ends with a discussion of land use. Part 2 then contains specific policy comments derived from the Introduction. They are grouped into sections similar to those in the draft plan.

10. Some of our suggestions may sound far-reaching. But, given that many are now saying things the Green Party (then called the Ecology Party) was saying 10 years ago, we believe that many of them will be very relevant to the timescale of this Plan and should be given due consideration.

11. We recognise that District Councils are increasingly constrained by Government Circulars, and that some of the things we suggest might therefore not be legal at present. But this is no excuse for not making clear what Vale Royal needs.

1.2 Sustainable communities

1. "The massive social experiment of urban resettlement has proved a disastrous failure," writes Jonathan Porritt⁴, "- and many new development programmes continue even now to add to the burden. The social bonds that foster genuine cohesion and mutual support are torn apart. Everything and everybody is 'zoned' in an attempt to organize everything rationally: live here, shop there, play somewhere else, and work wherever you can get it. Many traditional sources of employment are thoughtlessly destroyed; corner shops, small businesses, workshops - everything has to go as part of the great plan."

2. As he goes on to illustrate, and as is now being realised in Government circles, this is a problem in both urban and rural areas. "As the mainstay of the local economy collapses, more people move out, creating ghettos for the disadvantaged, the old and the unemployed. You can't just dissect communities like this; such a fragmenting of social relations goes completely against the grain of life. ... Over the last twenty years our rural communities have gradually wasted away; farm workers have become an endangered species ... small farmers have been displaced as the move towards larger and larger units continues unchecked, despite clear evidence that this does nothing to enhance real productivity. Transport systems are 'slimmed down'; village schools and post offices are 'reluctantly closed'; farm buildings and cottages remain empty."

3. What is needed, in both urban and rural areas alike, is sustainable communities. The Green Party believes that policies should be designed to humanise, rather than dehumanise, society as much as possible. This generally means a presumption in favour of smaller, more self-contained communities, in contrast to the current trend to ever greater mobility, 'accessability', and transience, all of which contribute to the rootlessness of many people today.

4. The comment about 'bread and circuses' is famous. But we have its equivalent in recent years - the simplistic, materialistic model of human beings that treats us as 'housing demand' figures, and attempts to provide 'jobs' or 'services'. Sustainable communities are much more than this, since people have a spiritual as well as a physical dimension - they value, and are affected by, personal and social relationships, beauty, security, sense of purpose, sense of belonging and being loved. (Here we use the term 'spiritual' in a broad sense, not a purely religious one.) The spiritual dimension should be explicitly recognised in the Local Plan.

5. The advantages of sustainable communities are felt both by people, who enjoy being part of them, and by society at large, which finds they cost less. This is

particularly true if indirect costs are taken into account. A sustainable community, whether of town or country, does not deteriorate, though it may change. It has lower vandalism, lower policing costs, lower health costs, fewer traffic-related costs. Its people are less dependent on centrally-supplied goods and services, and it is less vulnerable to large outside changes. It restores its resource base, and cleans up after itself. It can be a pretty Cheshire village, or a small part of a run-down urban area.

1.3 What are sustainable communities?

1. Community A was a large housing scheme. The residents had been rehoused from a slum-clearance. But it was not sustainable, and is now being demolished. A community needs more than 'housing'.
2. Community B was a well-to-do area. The residents made sure that the 'tone' of the area was kept up, by keeping ordinary people out. It became too expensive to live there, and one by one the large houses were bought up as hotels. The few people who now live there are now isolated. Communities need variety.
3. Community C was a village, whose residents worked and shopped twenty miles away. Most of their children were ferried to school twenty miles away. Most used cars for convenience. All they did there was sleep and tend their gardens. The local shop closed, as did the bus service and school. Those without a car became very isolated, and the community died. Communities are where people centre their lives.
4. Community D was a town with an industrial estate to provide 'jobs'. It boomed for a time. Since the units were out of sight on the zoned estate, nobody noticed the pollution they caused. But the truth about the products dawned. Most were ephemeral. Some were harmful. None actually met local real needs. As fashions changed and people's concern about harmful things heightened, the markets slumped. Firms closed, the estate became derelict, and unemployment and alienation soared. As far as possible, industry should be integrated into the community.
5. Some of these are true stories. We could go on. The car-dependent community is not sustainable - not just because oil runs out, nor because pollution and lack of exercise raises disease levels. Since no-one in such a community walks nowadays, no-one gets to know and truly value the area in which they live.
6. A sustainable community can be characterised by a number of things:
 - People centre their lives there, find most of their needs met there.
 - People actively participate in decisions and care for their locality.
 - There is variety in ages, occupations, building types, etc.
 - The community is in balance with the local and global environment.
 - The community is dynamic, yet steady-state in its make-up.
7. The first requires, for instance, that each community should have shops, services and employment. Winsford has "lots of youngsters with nothing to do"⁵. The second requires not only active civic societies and well run Parish or Community Councils, etc., but, probably more important, a maximum of local control of industrial and commercial enterprises. The third requires careful monitoring and planning of building types, and a consideration, not only of employment that a business offers, but what type of employment. The fourth speaks of a dynamic equilibrium, in which the environment is neither depleted nor destroyed. In the local context it requires, for example, adequate local waste disposal sites and services. In the global level of world resources, people should not be forced to use their cars by poor, sparse layout, and buildings should have high thermal efficiency. The fifth means that people are free to move around the housing scales,

that there is a reasonable level of interchange with the outside world, but that there should never be any large developments that will have a shock effect on the community. If size is to be increased (perhaps to comply with Government-imposed legislation) then it should be done gradually. Lastly, all these require that people are given the information they require to take an interest in their community and contribute wisely to its decisions.

8. Though there must be a 'spiritual' dimension to any attempt to encourage communities to flourish, planning has a large part to play. To achieve sustainable communities, the overall strategy may conveniently be seen as twofold:

- the sub-division of large urban areas into workable, integrated communities, each with closer ties with and understanding of the adjoining rural economy and life, and
- the revival of rural communities, with especial care to sustain visual character, genetic diversity and the agricultural base.

9. Probably the most important condition for the creation of sustainable communities is that developments should be small, including around Northwich and Winsford. Small communities can be understood and valued by the people who comprise them, and so almost automatically fulfil many of the requirements above. What 'small' means in numerical terms, will depend on local conditions.

10. Though these characteristics may sound rather utopian when taken as a whole, they are better seen as attributes against which the health of each community can be measured, and an indicator of general direction. We urge a survey of communities in Vale Royal along these lines, and then a reshaping of Local Plan policies to correct the deficiencies found. Some general policies that result from these are suggested in section 2 below.

1.4 The global dimension

1. That cliché of the global village is becoming ever more true. Almost everyone is now acutely aware of the famine that beset Ethiopia and the Sudan - and people have shown they are willing to be generous. After years of denying it, the Government has admitted the problem of Acid Rain to the tune of £600M.

2. So it is disappointing that the Vale Royal Local Plan has virtually no mention of the global, or even national, aspect. It does not even take into account the proximity of places like Crewe or Runcorn. While the Local Plan should stand up for the local view of things, we believe it should include a global dimension. What happens in Vale Royal affects the rest of the UK and the world, and the rest of the world affects Vale Royal. There are three main areas - pollution, resource depletion, and international relations.

3. Pollution generated locally adds to the global problem and resources used in Vale Royal deplete the global stocks. But we must go further than that. Activities in Vale Royal rely on pollution being generated elsewhere (eg. Fiddler's Ferry), on non-renewable resources being consumed elsewhere.

4. Garrett Hardin⁶ outlines what he calls the Tragedy of the Commons. It is worth quoting at some length:

Picture a pasture open to all. ... As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain. Explicitly or implicitly, more or less consciously, he asks, 'What is the utility to me of adding one more animal to my herd?' This utility has one negative and one positive component. The positive component is a function of the increment of one animal. Since the herdsman receives all the proceeds from the sale of the additional animal, the positive utility is nearly +1. The negative component is a function of the additional overgrazing created by one more animal. Since, however,

the effects of overgrazing are shared by all the herdsmen, the negative utility for any particular decision-making herdsman is only a fraction of -1. Adding together the component partial utilities, the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy."

5. Vale Royal can only evade its responsibility to the global Commons if there is another district, of similar size and effect that assumes a double responsibility - and no such exists. Therefore, it is important, not only to preserve the Vale Royal environment but also to discourage, if not disallow, those activities that damage the global or national environment.
6. In the limited field of Conservation alone, the warning bells are sounding. The World Conservation Strategy³ warns that "Living resources essential for human survival and sustainable development are increasingly being destroyed or depleted. At the same time human demand for those resources is growing fast." It then goes on to detail a few examples. Though this is a world problem, it must be tackled here.
7. Giles Merritt, writing in The Independent recently⁷, said, "the fundamental problem is that the politics of anti-pollution measures are now hopelessly bogged down. ... the UK is nowadays much resented by the rest of northern Europe for its refusal to clean up airborne pollution." While the Thatcher Government stubbornly refuses to seriously tackle environmental problems, Vale Royal can in a small way help to redress the balance.
8. One example where we can take action is road transport. This consumes unnecessarily high amounts of petrochemicals and accounts for over 50% of the Nitrogen Oxide, Carbon Monoxide and Hydrocarbon pollution generated in the UK⁸. The Local Plan can help here, by allocating land for all larger developments adjacent to railways, and by positioning houses and services so that people do not need to use their cars so much. This is discussed in more detail in the section on Transport.
9. Another example is energy. It is disappointing that the Local Plan hardly mentions this important subject. There should be a section on Energy, where it should be made clear that planning permission will only be given if the energy consumption is well below (say 30%, since this can be achieved with only a 1/2% rise in building costs) that allowed by the current Building Regulations.
10. The efficiency of Fiddler's Ferry power station is around 30%, much of the energy being poured into the sky as waste heat. Combined Heat and Power (CHP) schemes, on the other hand, have an efficiency of 75%, since the waste heat is distributed around the locality. Free or cheap steam is one service that does attract industry to an area. Being essentially a local form of electricity generation, not only will transmission losses be reduced, but there can be more local control and awareness. The District Council should encourage CHP schemes; they can be built as part of eg. leisure centres.
11. The District Council should also encourage investment in renewable energy, such as wind, water or methane digesters. It should itself make use of things like solar pre-heating of boiler feed in its own buildings. The technology is becoming cost-effective.
12. The District Council should carry out a survey of the ways energy is consumed in Vale Royal, including heating of buildings and transport, in order to get a better picture of where attention should be focussed.
13. A third area, more national or regional than global, is waste and recycling. Waste should be treated as a resource, rather than just something to be disposed of.

Contrary to the County Council, we maintain that Landfill is NOT the most economic way of dealing with waste, when the economy of the community at large is considered. Therefore, Vale Royal District Council should resist strongly all attempts to use areas of current ecological value as waste tips, and instead press the County Council to invest in selective recycling, composting and the use of methane digesters in a serious way.

14. Vale Royal need not fear that adopting such truly conservationist policies will put it at a disadvantage compared with other Districts. On the contrary we believe that most sensible people realise that conservation is pure common sense, and will find such policies attractive - especially when they find their heating and fuel bills lower. It is, in effect, a reversal of the Tragedy of the Commons.

15. In the area of international relations, a crucial problem is the worsening imbalance between the world's deprived citizens and those who over-consume, and the ever-increasing militarisation that diverts funds from human needs. These issues were highlighted by the Brandt Report⁹, which suggested measures that should be taken to "address the mutual dangers threatening our children and grandchildren". Among these were a tax on trade and weapons sales, conservation of oil supplies, with proper controls, and a massive fund for food aid to the Third World. The gap between rich and poor, the North/South divide (on a world scale, not just in Britain), combined with the shortage of resources is a source of potential conflicts which threaten world peace.

16. The District and County Councils should be contributing to this global co-operation in a myriad of small ways. Discouraging profligate use of energy and resources will help. But one very practical thing the District Council can do, as Planning authority, is to refuse planning permission to those businesses that contribute to this global imbalance. As Guy Woodford has said¹⁰, "Our contribution to world trade will be one of promoting global balance ... by exporting, not arms, not luxuries for ruling elites, not capital intensive, energy intensive status symbols, but aids to genuine development - intermediate technology, basic tools, applicable farming methods, medicines, aids to hygiene, education in appropriate skills."

1.5 Environmentally sensitive integration

1. The World Conservation Strategy³ says that we "need to dispel any notion that conservation is a limited, independent sector". Conservation is like economics, and should permeate all sections of a plan.

2. We are pleased to see that the Local Plan goes some way towards this, in having over 30 direct and indirect references of the form "They should not conflict with the relevant policies contained in section 3.0 - Environment and Conservation." It is important that these clauses are given the weight in implementation that they appear to have in Policy.

3. However, the section, commented on later in more detail, is rather protectionist in its tone, and virtually ignores the global aspect.

4. It may be necessary to protect certain parts of the environment in order to minimize damage to them, but it is unwise to adopt a protectionist approach as a general policy. There are several dangers. One is that those parts that are not officially listed as protected are often considered fair game, even though they may be ecologically valuable. (Clause S3.16, which recognises this danger, is laudable, but has a loophole.) Another danger is that local people may feel unfairly restricted, and either lower their level of cooperation or even rebel. A third danger is that protection can very easily be lifted by future administrations.

5. A sounder approach is to treat the whole countryside as environmentally sensitive (including those parts inside town boundaries!). After all, wildlife,

nature, the biological world as a whole, is sensitive and can too easily be damaged without us realising it. To retain a viable biosphere, we have to learn to live in harmony with it as the rule, rather than the exception.

6. This means maintaining a healthy, diverse wildlife system throughout the whole District, not just in designated parts, and is of vital relevance to nearly all the individual sections of the Plan. Take Recreation and Tourism, for example. More people go bird-watching than go to football matches. Birdwatching serves as an important form of recreation to a vast number of people, which is inexpensive not only to the individuals, but to the community as a whole, who do not have to provide specialised developments or services. But the real joy of bird-watching is not so much to visit well-known nature reserves, but to see a wide variety of birds and other species wherever one walks. Protecting certain sites, while denuding most of the countryside of its wildlife, discourages the taking up of such a form of recreation, since one has to drive to a distant site, and local walks are boring. Maintaining a diverse wildlife everywhere, and living in harmony with it, encourages such forms. Moreover, the whole tenor of the countryside improves, making it more attractive to tourists.

7. But it does not mean a tight clamp on all development. On the contrary, given the need for sustainable rural communities, we should seek to integrate a reasonably wide variety of local activity into this overall biological context - farming, woodland, housing, small light industry, recreation, etc. We advocate greater flexibility in planning. But it is important that this flexibility is afforded to small, locally controlled enterprises, not to large ones, and that a wide selection of local people participate in decisions.

8. In the light of the Government's recent Ridley/Joplin proposals such flexibility is timely. At last, as the Green Party has been saying for years, food production is no longer seen as the only valid activity in the countryside.

9. (But the proposals themselves are severely flawed, in that they do not aim at a genuine integration. Instead, they seek to bring more urban life onto the countryside, and have little consideration for the sensitive nature of the biosphere.)

1.6 Agriculture and the Countryside

1. It used to be thought that Industry was the enemy of the environment. Today's intensive, industrial form of agriculture is probably more of an enemy. While Industry traditionally is dirty and noisy, and produces some of the better-known forms of pollution, intensive agriculture has resulted in many losses that many people are not aware of.

2. As the CPRE has pointed out'', 50% of our wetlands have been lost largely due to intensive agricultural methods since 1947, 40% of our broadleaved woodland, and a massive 95% of our flower-rich meadows. Our insect population has been damaged by spraying - and those of species that feed on insects. In many places intensive agriculture has led to losses of top soil, of beneficial species, and of general genetic diversity. Vale Royal should take warning.

3. People are becoming concerned about the treatment of intensively-bred animals, and wary of chemical residues in foods. Water authorities (including the Chester Waterworks Company and NWWA) are deeply worried about nitrates in our water supplies (carcinogenic), a direct result of using nitrogen-fertilizers. Silage effluent is a major cause of pollution; being 100 times as potent as raw sewage, it can kill waterways completely.

4. Modern farming, being capital intensive, uses very little labour. This has meant a gradual de-population of the countryside, and a consequent reduction of services. Up to the recent Joplin/Ridley proposals, the countryside was officially

reckoned to be just one vast food factory. So village communities have died, becoming mere dormitories. The woman (or man) who wishes to stay at home to look after children or other people is very isolated. There is an urgent need to bring people back into the countryside who will not only sleep there, but centre their lives there.

5. Another problem is the low rate of new entrants into farming, owing to the lack of small farms on the market; there will be a significant generation gap and skills shortage in years to come.

6. Many farmers are aware of these problems, but feel caught in a treadmill. Some have yet to discover they are caught. Debts are mounting, so the farmer must maximize his or her output to cover the debt repayments - by ever increasing intensification. But this has only exacerbated the problem, since the proportion of national income spent on food has fallen in real terms, and the farmers' income with it, while the price of chemical and fuel inputs, increases at least as fast as inflation. So debts rise faster. Food surpluses result, and quotas threaten their very livelihood. Small farmers are particularly vulnerable.

7. The Government's recent proposals to take land out of production, though a partial answer, are, as mentioned above, fundamentally flawed in not aiming for a true integration. But also, since they do not tackle the problem of intensive farming at its root, they are likely to lead to a situation where the 'real' farming is done in the South and East, ever more intensively, while Cheshire farmers will in effect take on the role of wardens in a vast non-productive safari park. David Bellamy¹² is concerned that, "Rather than farm less intensively, the farmers are going for a policy of set-aside". Farming is a biological activity, and cannot sustainably be an industrial one.

8. Not only must farming become de-intensified, but it will do so. It is an aberration of history, and especially post-war policies, and, given its generation of so many problems and its heavy dependence on dwindling energy resources, it simply cannot last. So it is extremely unwise if our disposal of 'redundant' farm buildings, for instance, rests on the assumption that intensive farming is forever. Vale Royal District Council must be made more aware of these realities.

9. Many farmers realise the predicament they are in. But only a few are both sufficiently far-sighted and brave to reverse the trend, eg. by developing wildlife areas and turning some of their fields over to organic growing. Most, like the rest of us, are cautious. The Green Party believes it is important that farmers are given whatever help they need, both stick and carrot, to escape this treadmill of intensive farming - for the sake of farming itself, and for the sake of the environment.

10. The Local Plan can help, and whatever help is given will ultimately will be for the benefit of Vale Royal as a whole. Rural Voice, in their policy statement, Agriculture and the Rural Economy¹³, say "We urge a shift in vision ... which, by paradox, lies close to the role which farming played before cheap corn took the heart out of it over 100 years ago, long before the wartime blockade led to single-minded focus on food production. We urge that agriculture be seen as a multi-purpose industry", and "These issues, if set alongside food production, may provide the basis for new thinking and for self-help and diversified enterprise among farmers." What this means is:

- an environmentally-sensitive, diverse agriculture, and
- a thought-out integration of a variety of environmentally-benign activities, brought in to the countryside.

11. (It is interesting how closely the Rural Voice policy statement parallels what we have been saying here. Its main shortcoming, in our eyes, is that it lacks a global dimension and is somewhat constrained by conventional economic thinking.)

12. Policies in the Local Plan should be aimed at re-building this variety, in a controlled way, gradual enough to avoid shocks in existing communities or ecologically important areas, and at discouraging intensive farming and encouraging non-intensive farming. Organic farming is no longer the realm of a few cranks, but is a burgeoning activity.

13. The Green Party advocates de-intensification grants, with these and other grants linked to the drawing up of comprehensive Farm Management Plans, similar to those a bank manager will ask for when a small business approaches him/her for a loan. (Also, at a national level, the Green Party advocates resource and pollution taxes, which will automatically encourage less intensive agriculture, and a Basic Income Scheme (see below), which will give much-needed income support rather than price support, and so help farmers through a difficult time.) Is it possible for Vale Royal District Council to help its farmers in any of these ways?

14. Intensive forestry is as bad as intensive farming. Much of Delamere Forest is a disappointment for visitors, with its uniformity and lack of wildlife. A lot of mixed, broad-leaved planting of native species is needed, preferably in small units. The Green Party believes that planning legislation should be extended to cover forestry.

1.7 Ways of Life

1. Though the Local Plan is mainly concerned with land use, this cannot really be divorced from the way people live and businesses operate. House people near a station, and they are more likely to use it. We ought to aim to encourage good ways and discourage harmful.

2. Some aspects of the way we live or do business must change. Instead of the present consumer society, we must become a conservator society, where the tragedy of the commons no longer applies. To reduce oil and hydrocarbon consumption people in Vale Royal must use their cars less and Vale Royal farmers must reduce their chemical inputs. To reduce the pollution and waste problems, recycling should be actively encouraged in Vale Royal. The increasing centralisation of food supply has led to the need for increasing amounts of plastic packaging to keep food fresh, and such products cannot be disposed of easily - even incineration releases toxins like Dioxin. Food distribution is now the single largest user of road freight, at 22%¹⁴ - another largely unnecessary waste of oil resources and cause of deaths and injuries. So the increasing centralisation of food supply should be reversed in Vale Royal, by positive encouragement for small, locally-owned shops.

3. Though a few good souls will voluntarily reduce their pollution-related consumption, most of us - and most businesses - will not respond significantly until there are either financial incentives to do so, or planning constraints and encouragements. It is the latter that is the subject of the Local Plan.

1.8 Jobs and the New Economics

1. The "balance between the need for jobs and economic growth and the need to protect the environment", that §4.2 (reasons) in the draft Plan speaks of, will be difficult to achieve if conventional attitudes to jobs and economic growth are adopted.

2. There is an old adage which runs:

"Flee love, and it will follow thee;
Follow love, and it will from thee flee."

It is true of jobs and economic prosperity too. A hundred years ago it was firms that sought a measure of justice that prospered - Cadbury, Lever Bros., etc. - rather

than those that sought prosperity itself. It is the same for the businesses and local authorities of today, except that justice needs a different interpretation. Instead of seeking prosperity or jobs directly, we should seek that which is ultimately more worthwhile, and then jobs and prosperity will emerge as a result.

3. Unemployment has become the big issue of the day, and the need to 'provide jobs' is now widely accepted in the uncritical way that the need to reduce inflation was, when Mrs. Thatcher came to power. Uncritical acceptance of providing jobs as the lone goal is, we believe, as dangerous and misleading as was that of reducing inflation. There are at least three fundamental reasons (as well as two practical ones outlined in the section of Industry and Employment below).

4. First, we are moving into a post-industrial society and economy, in which, as Hazel Henderson ¹⁵ says, "the link between jobs and income has been broken." Though there is much work to be done (eg. keeping the place tidy, or tackling pollution or dereliction) there are too few paid jobs. Technological advance has always been accompanied by an increase in unemployment, and will continue to do so; the hope of expanding world markets just waiting for UK goods is largely a myth. Possession of an income sufficient to live at a reasonable but basic level should be divorced from the ability to find paid work - that is the reasoning behind the Green Party's policy for a Basic Income Scheme.

5. (The Basic Income Scheme replaces numerous benefits - unemployment, supplementary, child benefits and old age pensions and others - with a basic income and abolishes various taxes like national insurance. There are various ways of paying for it. The tax/benefit system would be simplified. Employers would have more incentive to employ part-time workers. And, since the basic income would not be withdrawn when people start earning, the poverty trap would be eliminated and there would be greater incentive to work. At present, since many benefits are withdrawn when people work, they are better off on the dole.)

6. Second, the clamour for jobs does not differentiate between types of jobs. As Guy Woodford¹⁰ points out, "It is no longer adequate indiscriminately to praise all production, as if the production of say, plastic flowers, medicines, winter clothing and biological weapons are all equally good. Some contribute to national well-being, some clearly do not. A job which increases basic wealth, and does so on a renewable basis, is worth infinitely more than one that squanders irreplaceable resources or threatens disaster." Most people are not really satisfied when the 'job' they expend their life on is trivial or harmful, but has been brought into existence as part of the effort to provide jobs.

7. Third, an emphasis on 'jobs' ignores the true value of the huge amount of voluntary work that is performed. Look after an elderly relative, and your hard work goes unrecognised; pay someone else to do so, and you have 'provided a job' - but the sum total of real value to society does not increase. In fact, it may even decrease, if the 'professional' care is carried out in a cold manner. Striving to create jobs out of work that could be as well done on a voluntary basis is a fool's errand.

8. Jobs are not a commodity to be 'provided'. Instead of jobs (or 'employment'), the Local Plan should speak in terms of what might be called Good Work. This is the type of human endeavour which increases the overall health and real wealth of the community without depleting its local or global resources.

9. Shifting the emphasis from full employment to Good Work is one of three thrusts of what is known as the New Economics¹⁶. The other two concern trade and economic growth.

10. The idea behind free trade, where people specialise on producing what they are good at and then trade their output for other goods, is common sense at first sight. But there are problems. Too much specialisation makes the producer vulnerable, and can mean resources are squandered which should be used to supply

local needs. Countries that use their land for a cash crop, rather than growing food, are an obvious example. So are mining villages. It can apply at the District level too. If the emphasis on free trade is taken too far, and the strategy is seen merely in terms of exporting as much as possible to other areas, this is a recipe for problems later on, when the goods are no longer in demand.

11. Instead of Free Trade, we should aim for Self-Reliance. This is not the same as full self-sufficiency, in that it includes a healthy level of trade, but the emphasis changes. Vale Royal should maximise local supply of local needs, especially food. A move in this direction would, as a bonus, reduce the overall transport needs.

12. Today's whole effort to achieve economic growth is misdirected. Not only is the measure of growth, Gross National Product, universally agreed to be flawed, in that it ignores much that is good in society, and it is almost entirely materialistic, forcing us to devalue the spiritual. Using GNP as a measure, a road accident is 'good' since it generates economic activity (in health services and car repair), while voluntary work is not.

13. Instead of economic growth, we should aim for a much broader concept - what the New Economics calls Well-being. There will still be growth, but of a different kind - dynamic yet steady-state. Growth in a child, or in a person's character, is to be welcomed, but growth in someone already 6'6" tall is not. Well-being is a measure of the overall health and wealth of society and the environment, and requires new indicators.

14. We urge Vale Royal to adopt a form of community accounting, or social and environmental audit. The Norwegian Government has been doing a limited form of this for ten years - by including the capital value of their resource base in their calculations.

15. S2.5 says, that "the need to attract employment into the District or provide the conditions to encourage growth have become the major issues to be resolved. It is therefore essential to continue to provide for industrial and commercial expansion ...". This is at best misdirected, and at worst dangerous. It is likely to mean yet more environmental and human sacrifices that we or our children will have cause to regret.

16. On the other hand, sustainable communities, with environmentally-sensitive integration will generate prosperity and jobs - of a worthwhile kind. Just as it was those that sought justice rather than riches in the 19th Century who prospered and remain to this day, so it is today. We believe that, for local authorities in the last decade of the 20th Century, justice means sustainable communities, environmentally-sensitive integration and recognising our global responsibility. Then, and only then, can our true and lasting prosperity be ensured.

1.9 Land Use

1. Apart from its people, land is the major resource that the nation possesses. Our real wealth depends on how productively we use our land (the term 'productive' is used in its wider environmental sense; allowing land to remain unused can be productive, as an investment, in maintaining wildlife and a pool of genetic diversity).

2. But land is a limited resource. Land use in each district should be monitored and planned, to maintain a proper balance, with particular caution about those changes in use that are nearly irreversible. Building houses on agricultural land effectively removes it from productive use for the best part of 100 years.

3. For a similar reason, withholding land from productive use for speculative gain is an evil to be discouraged. Land ultimately 'belongs' to no person, in the

way that a car or book does. We are stewards of the land, not owners. And those that hold land at present should be very mindful of their stewardship to others around and to those that come after. The Green Party recognises this by advocating a Community Ground Rent. This is a land use tax which, working in conjunction with planning policies, provides financial incentives to maintain a balance of land use. Ultimately it should be implemented nationally; but could it be implemented locally on a trial basis?

4. The topics in previous sections of this Introduction all have implications for land use policy. The need for sustainable communities implies the need for variety of land use in all areas, for developments to be small, and for change of use of existing buildings to be obtainable more easily. Environmentally-sensitive integration requires that all land uses be environmentally benign, that food production is not the only value of the countryside, that farming must be de-intensified. Decisions about land use must be made on the basis of the effects they will have on ways of life or business. In particular, narrow financial considerations, that figure so prominently at present, must not be the overriding factor. Derelict land and infill sites should be used, in preference to green-field sites.

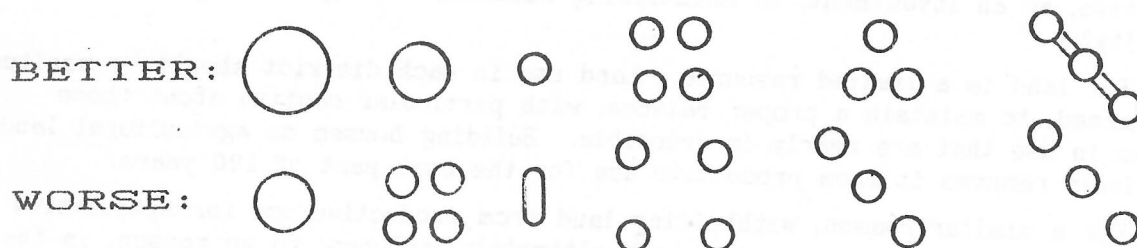
5. One issue of particular current importance is that of 'redundant' agricultural land. Current food surpluses may suggest, and the Government seems to have fallen for this, that much is indeed redundant. But the surpluses are a result of intensive agriculture which, as shown above, simply cannot continue indefinitely. What does this mean? Just that farmland is not as redundant as it seems. In a short period, when farming starts to become de-intensified, we will need most of that land again - and therefore should not thoughtlessly sacrifice it now. The same applies also to 'redundant' farm buildings.

6. Until we have achieved full environmentally-sensitive integration, there will be a need to plan the location and connection of areas of ecological value. Fig 1. (based on the World Conservation Strategy) shows the types of arrangements that should be aimed at. Of particular importance are wildlife corridors such as hedgerows that are not flail mowed too often, so that our wildlife can move about. A study of the M56 in Cheshire, "found that only 7% of marked Orangetip butterflies ever crossed the carriageway, though they move freely up and down the verge."¹⁷ Major roads are very effective barriers to wildlife movement.

7. There is a strong tendency to 'tidy up', which should be resisted. A piece of countryside that juts into a town or village is important as open space, as farmland or woodland, as a corridor by which wildlife can enter the town. But such is so often lost by the desire to 'tidy up' boundaries. Tidying up is sometimes necessary, but when it becomes a mentality it is the antithesis of sustainable communities or environmentally-sensitive integration, since both demand variety.

Fig. 1. Geometric principles for wildlife habitats.

Each blob represents a habitat. In each pair the top arrangement is better.



Based on World Conservation Strategy³

2. STRATEGY

In the Introduction we have sought to indicate that the times are changing, and there is a need for a fundamental re-think in some areas. To summarise, we believe the Local Plan should be based on:

- building and maintaining sustainable communities in town and country,
- an awareness of our global responsibilities,
- environmentally-sensitive integration, especially relating to agriculture,
- a more enlightened way of thinking about jobs, trade and economic growth.

In the context of the Local Plan, these would suggest the following general policies:

2.1 All policies and planning applications should be judged by their contribution to the social and environmental fabric of the district. In particular, the aim should be to build and maintain sustainable communities and environmentally-sensitive integration of a variety of activities.

2.2 All policies and planning applications should be judged according to their global effects in the areas of pollution, resource depletion and international relations.

2.3 Since sustainable communities are, almost by definition, small in size, and since they must be protected from development shocks, it is important that only small developments are allowed. The huge development west of Leftwich is a gross mistake. It is difficult to define 'small', but we suggest as a rough guide, that new housing should be built at a rate of a certain percentage (determined by population growth etc.) of the size of the community per year for communities that need to grow, and half that for those that do not. A limit on individual developments of around 12 houses would be wise, as this would create minimum shock and maintain variety; there may be several such developments in a community, and there may be exceptions in individual cases. In any case, there should be an explicit general presumption in favour of small developments, whose strength is inversely proportional to the size.

2.4 Owing to the need to revive rural areas, and build up sustainable communities therein, we believe it is time to abandon, or at least seriously reduce, the policy of concentrating all development around Northwich and Winsford (£4.6, £5.1). Development should be distributed around the whole district in many small developments.

2.5 Section 4.1, in which land is allocated for employment "will be related to the needs of the existing local population" is laudable at first sight. But there is a danger of a Catch-22 situation developing in those communities that are dying on their feet. With a tiny population, no new industrial or commercial activity is allowed, so the community remains stagnant. Sections 5.9 and 7.1 are similar. The last paragraph of section 2.4 is a mistake, and would be unnecessary if there were an explicit presumption in favour of small developments of the kind recommended above.

2.6 There is a need to protect rural areas in northern Vale Royal from a bulging Warrington, and a Green Belt designation is therefore probably necessary. But it is a rather blunt instrument, effectively preventing the rural communities washed over by it becoming truly healthy or sustainable.

2.7 If the above policies, ensuring small, sustainable development were included in the Plan, then Green Belt would perhaps be less necessary. But, should Green Belt

still be thought to fulfil a useful purpose, then the case for making it smaller has not been adequately made, and we believe it should actually be extended.

2.8 The point is not so much to prevent immigration into Vale Royal from outside, but to protect all communities in Vale Royal from any form of shock due to a scale of immigration that they cannot stand. This is what we mean by sustainable communities being steady-state.

2.9 Sustainable communities, being dynamic, require more frequent change of use of buildings. Such planning permissions should be easier to obtain, but there should be safeguards, such as short-term permission. Also, change of use should not be allowed where it would exacerbate an existing imbalance in the community or contribute to global problems, and conversely encouraged when it reduces such problems.

2.10 In all areas variety should be aimed at. This will help reduce vulnerability of communities, and also make the area more interesting to both tourists and residents. We believe the concept of zoning should be essentially abandoned.

2.11 Owing to the need to conserve energy, and the fact that this can be done at very little extra cost in new buildings (a 30% increase in insulation costs only ½% more), and given the anti-environmental stance of the present Government, we believe it is important for Vale Royal District Council to take a lead in requiring higher standards of thermal efficiency in all new buildings. If it is legal to do so, we suggest adding a policy to require all new buildings to be designed and built to much higher thermal standards, making particular use of passive solar heat gain, which can reduce heating bills to less than half current levels. All planning applications should be required to include a statement of thermal efficiency.

2.12 In any case, all new public buildings should be so designed and built.

2.13 Since road transport is a major pollutant and unnecessarily high consumer of diminishing resources, all development should have, as its aim, that of reducing the need for road transport, whether freight or private car. This is discussed in more detail in the Transport section below.

2.14 It is vital that local people are fully involved in all planning activities, and given sufficient high-quality information, and where necessary education, to do this. Otherwise, the danger is that we will swing between the two extremes of ad-hocery (as under the present Government) and totalitarianism (which we saw in the 1960s). People can be trusted. As the Prince of Wales said¹² "Behind the crumbling walls, the vandalism and the apparent hopelessness live extremely shrewd and articulate people. All they want is imaginative help to get themselves out of the mess that surrounds them. Their own ideas, if listened to, are far more practical than those from outside."

2.15 In this regard, we praise the tireless efforts of the Planning Department to explain the draft Plan to the people of Vale Royal - involving several weeks of evening work for the staff - and their willingness to consider other options. It is to be regretted that, because of mistakes made in the 1960's, people see Planners as 'them' who will 'get their way regardless'. The Green Party recognises the good sense of many of today's Planners, and would encourage them to plan positively, yet with a certain humility, remembering the Prince's words above, rather than just respond to apparent demands or extrapolated predictions. (This may seem to conflict with our distaste of what Jonathan Porritt, quoted in the section of Sustainable Communities, calls 'the great plan'. What he was talking about was totalitarian planning of the 1960s, where you were made to feel a 'traitor' if you included a pitched roof. We believe in positive planning, but it should be done sensitively.)

2.16 The Green Party supports the suggestions made by the Town and Country Planning Association¹³, that the planning activity should be devolved to a more

local level, with Planning Department officers and others having a consultancy role, and investigating and advising on the more global and long-term aspects of each application. There may be a need in some instances to take time to explain such broader issues, but once local people come to see the need for an environmentally sensitive approach - and it seems that most ordinary people are well ahead of the politicians in this respect - then we have little doubt that such a system will work very well.

2.17 We recognise the difficult position that Planning Officers are in, being constrained by Central Government, especially relating to housing land allocation. The Green Party deplores this increasing centralism. Given that the Government may change during the life of the Plan, we suggest that the Plan includes a list of policies labelled as desirable but currently forbidden, to be brought into play when constraints are lifted.

3. ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

3.1 As discussed in the Introduction, this section has a rather protectionist slant. Instead, it should treat all the countryside as environmentally sensitive, and seek for a proper integration of a wide variety of activities within this context. The aim of building sustainable communities, in which people value their surroundings, is paramount.

3.2 For the reasons outlined in the Introduction, we believe that specification of Conservation and other Special areas (eg. §3.14, 3.27) can be dangerous, without a blanket statement that all areas will be treated as environmentally sensitive. To this end we welcome the inclusion of §3.26, designed to avoid decline in the ecology of areas not subject to special policies. But the phrase 'as far as possible' is a dangerous loop-hole, since anyone can claim impossibility on economic grounds.

3.3 In this section there are 7 clauses aimed at preserving the aesthetic character, 10 at preserving heritage, 7 at preserving wildlife habitats, 1 at preventing pollution, 2 at hazards, 5 concerned with special items, none at reducing consumption of non-renewable or slowly-renewable resources, and none at preserving the global environment. As discussed in the introduction, the last two are important and part of Vale Royal's responsibility. While heritage and aesthetic character are important, we believe the section is rather unbalanced.

3.4 We would like to see Genetic Diversity explicitly mentioned. It is on the genetic diversity of the area, and of the world, that much of our real future wealth depends.

3.5 Since intensive agriculture is a major polluter and destroyer of wildlife, it should be actively discouraged in Vale Royal, and not be allowed where it could affect any sites of ecological value. This will not just include geographical nearness, but also such considerations as streams that may be killed by silage effluent run-off. The Green Party would seek to remove the curse of intensive agriculture altogether, using Pollution and Resource taxes and de-intensification grants. This is the only real answer to food surpluses, and a very necessary precondition to reviving rural areas. But we recognise such a policy is too radical for inclusion in the 1987 Vale Royal Local Plan, and so merely recommend here the above limited form.

3.6 Killing animals just for sport is an affront to us, to them and to their Creator. We urge Vale Royal District Council to make it clear that all such activities will be banned from council-owned land.

3.7 The importance of 'wildlife corridors' to link habitats, so that wildlife can travel between them is now well known. The World Conservation Strategy³ gives a more complete list of geometric principles, shown above in Fig. 1. A survey should be carried out on how well the areas of ecological value in Vale Royal match these

principles. (We understand that the County Ecologist has a database of all such areas.)

4. INDUSTRY AND EMPLOYMENT

4.1 In line with the need to revive rural areas, we believe that more flexibility should be shown in rural villages for the development of light or craft-based industry, provided it is on a small scale and meets local need. Therefore, S4.6 is counter-productive.

4.2 In all places, preference should be given to industry which helps meet true local needs, other than that of employment. S4.1, in seeing 'local need' in purely employment terms, is dangerous, opening local authorities to what is little more than blackmail - "Allow this development, or we'll close down our existing operations in the area." Unscrupulous developers and others have quickly learned the language of providing jobs. S4.1 should be re-worded.

4.3 Seeking jobs for their own sake also tends to welcome large, non-local firms at the expense of local ones. This is often a mistake. Such firms have no loyalty to an area, and may easily move their activities away when it suits them. Preference should always be given to local employers.

4.4 We believe that S4.2 (ii) may conflict with the need to actually reduce road traffic (see Transport section), and so it should be reworded. All large industrial development should be located near a canal or railway line, so that carriage of freight by water or rail, in the oil-scarce future if not immediately, is not unnecessarily discouraged.

4.5 Industrial estates seem a good idea at first sight - keep all the nasty stuff away from where people live. But they lead to other problems. Out of sight, out of mind, they tend to be lax about pollution, noise, litter, visual appearance, etc. Being distant from where people live, workers must make long, time- and energy-consuming journeys to get there. The concept of industrial estates should be largely abandoned and, instead, small light industries should be dispersed throughout the communities of Vale Royal - some of them need such a stimulus. Larger industries should be individually, judiciously positioned near rail or canal, taking full account of local geography and geology. This is the difference between the old mills of yesteryear and today's boring industrial buildings. Such a policy will provide some incentive to increase standards all round - especially visual.

5. HOUSING AND POPULATION

5.1 Because the ground rules appear to have shifted since the draft plan was started, because the Joplin/Ridley proposals have appeared, which recognise that food production is not the only value of the countryside, and because there is a need to build and maintain sustainable communities in Vale Royal, we suggest that that sufficient land be identified to maintain the 5-year housing stock for (say) the next two years, and in the mean time the entire housing section of the Plan be re-designed.

5.2 We recognise there is a huge shortfall in housebuilding. The response to this should not be panic-driven, as that would result in shocks to communities and/or unwise destruction of good agricultural land or wildlife habitats. The needed housing should be supplied at a steady rate of small developments across the entire district, making maximum use of renovation, re-use of empty buildings, infill sites and derelict land. Though certain derelict land around Northwich may indeed be unsuitable, being of greater value as wildlife habitats, etc., we are not convinced by the arguments which say that little can be used. The overriding factor should

not be financial gain for developers, but sustainable communities and environmentally-sensitive integration.

5.3 S5.1 seeks to concentrate most new housing development around Northwich and Winsford. As discussed in the introduction, we believe the scale of this concentration is a mistake. The 226 acres of agricultural land, previously considered to be allocated for housing, may be a convenient way of meeting the Government-imposed requirements for maintaining 5 years' supply of housing land, but it will damage rather than build sustainable communities. Many people wish to stay in their current communities, not be transported to Davenham/Leftwich. Given that 5 years' supply of housing land must be maintained, we believe this should be distributed around the entire district in small parcels, so as to revive rural communities and ensure that all developments are small and do not impose a shock on the receiving area.

5.4 To maintain sustainable communities it is important that there is a range of house types, sizes and prices, and that in general houses keep their place in the price league. There should also be a supply of rented accommodation in most places. We welcome S5.7 (ii), which seeks to maintain a range of types, but think that S5.17 poses a danger. 'Improvement' should not be encouraged where the effect is just to increase the selling price.

5.5 S5.18 and 5.19 may be useful in protecting against the cowboy builder, who comes in, 'does up' a house and makes a fast buck. But they are too heavy-handed against local people who want to improve their properties for their own use, rather than for financial gain.

5.6 The above two paragraphs raise a more general point. The difference between the owner-occupier, who improves a property for his/her own use as part of a sustainable community, and the speculative developer, who does so for financial gain should be explicitly recognised, and different policies apply. The owner-occupier who seeks to 'improve' his or her property merely to sell at a higher price should be treated as a speculative developer. This suggests that there be a condition of continued residence on all permissions to improve property, and that such permissions should not be given if it would exacerbate or create a shortage of houses in a given price range.

5.7 We believe that there should be a presumption in favour of terraced houses, especially in villages. As John Tweed²⁰ points out, "Amongst the advantages of terraces in villages are: efficient use of site, and therefore lower cost per plot, lower building costs; lower energy costs; visual links with traditional village cottage rows; houses will maintain a proper position in the house price league (through future expansion of the houses being limited)."

5.8 Thus less than 145 acres need be allocated to maintain a 5-year supply.

5.9 We urge Vale Royal District Council to carry out a survey of the range of house sizes and prices in each community, as part of the overall survey of their sustainability mentioned in the Introduction.

5.10 As mentioned above, in view of the need to reduce energy consumption, (and in view of the increasing attractiveness to purchasers of low-energy homes) we believe it is in Vale Royal's interest to stipulate that houses will be expected to have energy consumption 30% lower than the limit set by the current Building Regulations (which are in any case rather lax by European standards), and that maximum use be made of such things as passive solar gain.

5.11 There is a small but growing number of people who wish to adopt a more self-sufficient lifestyle. Such people, requiring less in the way of services, generating less traffic, etc., would be the ideal occupants of many houses located in the countryside outside villages. While we support the general presumption against developing in the open countryside, we believe this should be relaxed in this kind

of case. Appropriate conditions would, of course, have to be attached to any such developments, and we would see these as being more the re-use of empty buildings than building new ones.

5.12 Housing co-operatives, such as that at Weller Street in Liverpool²¹, enable people to have a say in the type of housing in which they live, make the most of human initiative, and go a long way to building sustainable communities. Though not a panacea, they should be positively encouraged in Vale Royal to play their valuable part alongside private and council housing and housing associations. The Green Party is pressing for a legislative framework at the national level appropriate to Housing Co-operatives.

6. SHOPPING AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES

6.1 We support the spirit of §6.1, in seeking to concentrate on local needs, but, as mentioned in the introduction, would like to see a clear definition of what is meant by local needs.

6.2 Large supermarket chains consume large amounts of oil-related products, and generate large amounts of waste and pollution, in transporting their wares from distant centralised distribution points, in encouraging customers to make longer car journeys for shopping, and in the consequent need to wrap in plastics for freshness. They also lead to a reduction in overall variety in the locality, not only of goods available in a locality, but, perhaps more importantly, of counter services. It must not be forgotten that shopping is not only a commercial activity of meeting demand, but also a social activity. The elderly and lonely especially value what is generally called 'personal service'. Unfortunately, since this cannot be measured in terms of GNP (see the section, Jobs and the New Economics), its value is underestimated, and it is too often sacrificed in the interests of short-term economic gain and personal convenience of the well-to-do. It is a responsibility of Vale Royal District Council to ensure that these ingredients of a healthy society are not overlooked.

6.3 Many nearby towns, such as Crewe and Nantwich, are all eagerly trying to attract custom to their town centres. We must beware of over-supply of centralised shopping facilities. What chance does a place like Winsford have in such a race? The race is not worth winning, and even less taking part in, if in doing so we destroy so much else. Small corner shops serve a very useful function, and many have been lost, not by fair competition, but because local councils have subsidised their town centres. §6.6, etc. which restrict shopping developments to town centres and designated sub-centres, are a little too restrictive.

6.4 We therefore urge the inclusion of a presumption in favour of smaller, locally-owned shops and commercial services.

6.5 Where large developments are deemed to be needed, they should be sited in such a way as to reduce transport needs, and especially transport of an unecological kind. This generally means they should be within easy walking distance of where people live, and/or next to rail services, so that supplies and customers can arrive by rail rather than road. The District Council should ensure that there is always adequate public transport to such developments.

7. PUBLIC SERVICES

7.1 As mentioned earlier, clause §7.1 is dangerous, threatening to generate a Catch-22 situation for rural and other areas that are already under-served. It should be at least reworded to remove this problem.

7.2 §7.9 should include a clause to the effect that developments will only be allowed if they generate no extra road traffic.

8. TRANSPORT

8.0 This is a long section. We first outline the problems, then why current 'solutions' are counter-productive. We review the current situation, and then propose what we consider a more sensible way ahead.

8.1 As mentioned in several places in the Introduction, the current level of road traffic:

- is wasteful of limited oil and other resources;
- generates large amounts of pollution;
- causes a huge loss of human life and health, and of consequent lost production, due to accidents;
- causes destruction of wildlife and their habitats;
- causes nuisance to people in villages and other congested areas.

8.2 One problem of particular concern was highlighted by Stephen Mills¹⁷. The criteria by which the Department of Transport determines routes for new major roads are so designed that these roads home in on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which are then cut in two and usually seriously harmed. Of the 110 SSSIs damaged since the mid-60s, in 71 the Department of Transport was responsible.

8.3 40% of households are still without a car. We also find that many families who once had two cars now have only one - so the one who stays at home usually has no car to hand. Yet much attention is given to the 'plight' of drivers, at the expense of catering for the needs of those who have no car.

8.4 Car Parking is one example. It is a highly unproductive use of land, yet more and more land is devoted to it. When it is mainly for the convenience of those who do not wish to use their local shops, it is a gross mistake.

8.5 As Mick Hamer said²², "The choice is now between a society built around four wheels, or one which is built around people." Vale Royal planners have to make that choice for Vale Royal. Though much of the problem lies in people's perceptions and habits, planning can play an important part.

8.6 Though we recognise that there is a place for judicious use of cars and lorries, road transport should in general be reduced, not just diverted.

8.7 At best, building a bypass round one village or other congested area, just shifts the problem to the next. In fact, it makes the problems worse, by generating more traffic. In the short term, when people perceive there is an 'easier' road, they tend to make more journeys and longer journeys. In the longer term, business premises and houses are relocated to take 'advantage' of access to the trunk road or motorway system. So people travel further to work, and goods, to their destinations. So, both in the short and the long term, the total mileage goes up, and hence traffic. We are back where we started.

8.8 Constructing a bypass will lead to more traffic on country roads, which at present are relatively safe for cyclists.

8.9 We therefore believe that all proposed bypass schemes should be looked at very critically. Though it is very easy to listen to the pleas of people with juggernauts thundering past their doors, and the apparently clinical logic of the lorry lobby, and build a bypass, we will have to tackle the root of the transport problem sometime. It would be much wiser to start now.

8.10 It is generally assumed that building trunk roads into an area will increase its prosperity. The Leitch Committee²³ concluded, however, "that trunk road construction does not yield significant economic development gains." Instead, it can be argued that major roads into an area might actually reduce jobs in that area. Such roads help those businesses that are already geared up to use them, so goods and services that once were produced locally start to be supplied from afar -

and businesses in the prosperous South are more geared up to using the road system than businesses in Vale Royal. Whether such loss will be offset by gains due to 'attracting' new businesses is a moot point, but the North West has one of the best road systems, and one of the highest levels of unemployment.

8.11 Building new major roads is no real solution. Rather, we should plan in such a way as to reduce the need for transport and shift as much of the remainder (especially freight) to more ecological and socially useful forms of transport, such as rail, canal, cycling, walking or bus. The Green Party calls upon Vale Royal District Council to grasp the nettle, and make bold decisions that make sense over a longer timescale.

8.12 We are currently near the extreme point of a pendulum swing in favour of 'convenient' road transport. The problem is partly in people's perceptions (that car use is cheap, compared with public transport, whereas the real running costs of a car are three times the normal rail fare), partly in people's lack of awareness of the availability of public transport, and partly in the heavy direct and indirect subsidies to road use. Indirect subsidies include the massive tax concessions on company cars, the costs of health care and lost production for the nearly 6000 deaths, 80,000 serious injuries and a quarter of a million other injuries on our roads every year. These amount to a subsidy of several Billion£. To this is added a stream of one-off subsidies, such as the Government's recent writing off £750M debts of part of British Leyland before it was sold to Daf.

8.13 The UK is far behind its European neighbours in its attitude to transport. In France 80% of freight goes by rail and 20% by road; in Britain it is the other way round.

8.14 It is just not true that everybody likes using their cars. Stephen Plowden²⁴ reports some of the remarks made during a survey of people's attitudes:

"Although a car owner - my wife drives - we both hate cars but find with small children we need a car since public transport is so unreliable ..."

8.15 So we can expect the pendulum to swing away from this massively unnecessary use of our roads, as people start to realise the magnitude of the real costs involved and as hidden, indirect subsidies to road transport are reduced. Cycling is becoming more popular. Stations are re-opening. The availability of car transport in many families is actually reducing. Though it is too early for this to show up in transport statistics, the swing back has started.

8.16 It is therefore important that Vale Royal District Council does three things.

8.17 First, in conjunction with the County Council, it should support and seek to integrate public transport services, preventing them from deteriorating. This will involve, not just subsidies, but a continuous campaign, designed to make people more aware of the services that exist - and what they can use them for (a basic marketing rule is "Sell an effect, not a product").

8.18 Public transport in rural areas must be maintained. The problem of low use would be ameliorated if our policies of building sustainable communities in rural areas were followed through, and if the services were properly marketed. The Northwich - Frodsham - Runcorn service runs through some of Cheshire's most beautiful countryside, and links some of the main centres of Vale Royal. It would be very useful to walkers, and, in Frodsham, to shoppers going back up the hill. Yet few know of its existence, and even fewer know its timings.

8.19 Some of the running costs of the rail services should be borne by the local authority. This would not only help maintain services, but also allow some control over timings, so as to better integrate bus and train. While Cheshire County Council stubbornly refuses to do this, we urge Vale Royal District Council to consider subsidising certain services, unless expressly prohibited from doing so by law, such as:

- a late-night service for Frodsham/Helsby,
- extending the Hooton-Helsby service round through Frodsham to Runcorn Old Town (a service for which there seems to be much demand),
- improved out-of-hours services on the Delamere stretch of the line.

8.20 Second, it should ensure that people's and businesses' future options for ecological transport are not reduced. Loss of rail service, or canal to freight, will reduce such options, as will siting large developments far from canal or railway. In an oil-scarce future it is vital that such options are kept open.

8.21 Third, it should seek to reduce transport needs and shift as much of the remainder as possible to the more ecological forms. Ensuring that services are within walking distance will help here.

8.22 Vale Royal is immensely blessed with waterways. These should be used not only for leisure but also for freight, since they are one of the most ecological forms of transport. Therefore, firms near waterways should be positively encouraged to make more use of the waterways - eg. the Salt Mine at Winsford.

8.23 Both walking and cycling are important ecological forms of transport, and should be encouraged.. We were disappointed to find no mention of them in the draft Plan. There should not be too great a distance between where people live and where they shop or work. This means that the large housing zones of earlier years should not be repeated. Many small lockable cycle parks should be provided. The provision of cycle tracks should be seriously investigated.

9. RECREATION AND TOURISM

9.1 In view of the above-mentioned need to reduce road transport, we welcome §9.2, with its emphasis on reaching locations on foot or by public transport. We suggest including cycling in this list.

9.2 The type of tourist and recreational facilities favoured should be those that local people will enjoy. This will not only keep local money in Vale Royal, but will increase local people's appreciation of, and pride in, their locality and help to reduce traffic. Maintaining a diverse wildlife population everywhere is one such facility.

9.3 As mentioned in the Introduction, the existence of a healthy and diverse wildlife population all over the Vale Royal countryside (including those parts within towns!) is of major importance, both to recreation and tourism. Therefore all development and other policies should be aimed at restoring and/or maintaining this everywhere, not just in designated areas of ecological value.

9.4 §9.15, in allowing new roadside services on major routes, may pose a danger to existing local services that are not on major routes, but are near enough that local custom may be drawn away from them to the new services. We suggest adding a clause to prevent this.

9.5 We support the development of water-based recreation and tourist facilities, such as the Anderton Lift and a Second Cheshire Ring (§9.17, 9.18). This is an area in which Vale Royal has great potential, and is a type of recreation that generates less than average road traffic.

9.6 While it is tempting to see tourism as the great white hope for an area like Vale Royal, in that it might bring money into the district, there are dangers:

- damage to the fabric of local communities,
- an increase in traffic, and
- a tendency to ignore local needs.

Tourist attractions should be developed gradually, so as to control and monitor these problems.

10. AGRICULTURAL LAND AND BUILDINGS

(In the term 'agriculture' we include horticulture.)

10.1 As discussed in the Introduction, many of the problems that farming now finds itself faced with, and the environmental problems generated by farming, are due in large part to its intensification. Helping farmers escape the treadmill of intensive farming, by both stick and carrot, building sustainable communities in the countryside, and integrating a wide range of activities in an environmentally-sensitive way, is of paramount importance. The policy statement of Rural Voice¹³ says, "this Commission has ... invited local authorities ... to join with it in the pursuit of Rural Development Programmes designated to strengthen the rural economy and the vitality of rural communities."

10.2 Therefore, no new farm buildings should be allowed that are designed for intensive use, and §10.5 should boldly state that no intensive livestock producing units will be allowed.

10.3 If it is decided to retain §10.5 in its present form, then a clause should be added to the effect that all such developments must include plant to process and make use of all effluent, manure and other waste products. We are concerned to prevent pollution (silage pollution is 100 times more potent than human sewage in killing a waterway); we are also concerned that potentially useful feed products are not wasted. A Vale Royal firm has recently developed such plant²⁵, and should be encouraged.

10.4 While supporting the idea of converting some old farm buildings to other uses, in order to help revive rural areas with new activities, we are concerned that there is currently a rush to convert 'redundant' farm buildings into residential units - usually for sale as a second home or to the well-off commuter who will do little to contribute to a truly sustainable community. Many of these 'conversions' completely rob the buildings of their visual character. Vale Royal should be extremely careful about allowing this to happen too easily. The high level of intensification in agriculture cannot last; many farmers are going, or want to go, organic. So many of these buildings may soon be needed for their original uses, including for farm workers. The Local Plan should specifically mention this, for guidance.

10.5 We welcome the inclusion of a 'high standard of management' of farms as a reason for a presumption against taking good land for development, in §10.2. The high standard should be defined to favour non-intensive agriculture.

10.6 We believe the inclusion of the phrase 'a high amount of capital investment' in §10.2 is a mistake, since it will only serve to encourage intensification.

10.7 Because of the inclusion of the above phrase, and because of the emphasis on 'holdings' §10.2 will discriminate against small farms, which are now in urgent need of protection. §10.2 should be re-worded, to emphasise land rather than holdings, and to remove all mention of capital.

10.8 Moreover, the importance of small farms should be explicitly recognised in the Plan.

10.9 The visual appearance of many farm buildings, with their bare breeze block walls, is an affront to many people. Since current legislation excludes farm buildings from planning controls, Vale Royal District Council should actively seek the appropriate legislative changes.

11. AFTER USE OF MINERAL WORKINGS

We have no comments on this section.

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THE GREEN PARTY

The Green Party is Britain's fourth political party, the equivalent of *Die Grunen* in Germany. It was formed in 1973 as *The People's Party*, changing its name to *The Ecology Party* in 1975, and then to *The Green Party* in 1985. We fielded 53 candidates in the 1979 General Election, 109 in 1983, and intend to field 150 in 1987/8. We have contested many seats at local and County level.

However, the Green Party is *more than a political party*. It is also, in effect, a Research and Development organisation - for policies. We have taken seriously the problems posed by the various environmental threats, but rather than just try to escape, we are working out realistic policies for a sustainable form of society. We do not claim to get it right first time, but we are doing it because no-one else is doing it, and it desperately needs to be done.

One product of this process is our detailed *Manifesto for a sustainable society*, and the more readable *Politics for Life*. But this document, and several like them published by Green Parties up and down the country, are also part of this policy-forming process, but they go further in translating 'green' principles into specific policies relevant to a local situation.

Our starting point is that

The Planet and its resources are finite,
and all its inhabitants, inter-dependent.

Briefly, this means that we see our use of these resources in terms of stewardship, rather than ownership, and we seek to humanize rather than de-humanize society as far as possible. Some of our principles you have met here; others, not directly relevant to comments on a District Plan, cover defence, health, education, and many more.

We need to start afresh, though not in a violent way, and work out completely new policies for the society we are heading towards. We were saying this 10 years ago; now people in all walks of life are saying it too. The important thing is that environmental problems are intricately and fundamentally interwoven with issues like foreign relations, transport, technology, education, defence, etc.

Where do we fit alongside green groups in other political parties, and pressure groups like Friends of the Earth? The answer is, we complement them, doing things that they could not do, and accepting that they do things we cannot do. Green groups in the main political get their parties to adopt specific ecological policies; when these get onto the statute book, we are glad. But such an approach, adding on environmental piece by environmental piece, cannot be the full answer. In a post-industrial age we need an approach that starts from basic principles. It is the Green Party that provides this approach - and we are pleased if other parties adopt some of the policies we have worked out!

Similarly, the strength of pressure groups like Friends of the Earth is that they can very effectively focus people's eyes on single issues, but this is also their limitation. They find it difficult to maintain a holistic approach, which recognises that all areas are inter-linked and works on a broad front.

It is probably true to say that only the Green Party could have produced a document like this, which seeks to set policies on a truly ecological base.

If you would like more information about this document, or the Green Party in this area - perhaps you would like to help us in our General Election campaign by means of a donation or putting up a poster - then please contact:

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