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2.99 Whilst minor infilling and conversions is supported (in principle), in many villages, larger developments are restricted to the more sustainable settlements, (known as Category A settlements). There are currently 24 Category A villages however, we are aware that since the last surveys informing village categorisation levels of services and facilities may have changed.

2.100 We therefore intend, with the assistance of parish councils and the local communities, to re-survey each village to fully understand current levels of services, facilities and accessibility. We will also need to review and define our approach for distributing any future rural housing and employment growth, once that has been defined. In formulating this approach, we will be mindful of the levels of growth experienced by some villages and explore the pressures placed on local infrastructure, including the local road network, primary health provision and school places. Planning appeal decisions affecting some areas of the district have been controversial locally and led to calls from some for village categorisation to be re-examined and rural housing distribution to be re-considered.

2.101 Cherwell's rural areas have a diverse economy, including village centres, employment sites accommodating a wide range of industries, military bases and other previously developed land and operations. These may provide opportunities for redevelopment and expansion for local business and community needs. We also recognise that agriculture and food production still form an important component of the local economy.

2.102 The last Local Plan seeks to limit employment growth in the rural areas whilst promoting:

- Farm diversification
- Development on appropriate small-scale employment sites
- Re-use of existing sites
- Home working

2.103 The character of the rural area is varied and includes land of significant landscape and biodiversity value. A small part of the Cotswolds AONB lies within the north-eastern part of the District and to the south lies the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation. This environment helps attract tourists to the area to destinations such as Hook Norton Brewery, the Cropredy Festival and the Oxford Canal. The District's economy also benefits from having major attractions on its doorstep including Blenheim Palace, Warwick Castle and Stratford-upon-Avon.

2.104 Whilst Cherwell has many attractive villages with valued built and natural environments, high house prices and a reliance on commuting by private car could disadvantage those of limited means, and those seeking to live, work and access services locally. There are also some pockets of deprivation in Cherwell's rural areas.

2.105 The current Local Plan seeks to protect and where possible enhance local services and facilities. There are policies to protect the natural and built environment.

2.106 In addition to Cherwell's local plans a number of rural parishes in the District have prepared or are in the process of preparing Neighbourhood Plans. These Plans, prepared by the community, provide the opportunity for local concerns on social, environmental and economic issues to be addressed through spatial planning policies. Currently there are neighbourhood plans for Bloxham, Adderbury, Hook Norton and Mid Cherwell (covering the parishes of Ardley with Fewcott, Duns Tew, Fritwell, Kirtlington, Lower Heyford, Middle Aston, Middleton Stoney, North Aston, Somerton, Steeple Aston and Upper Heyford). Weston-on-the Green Neighbourhood Plan is well advanced. Plans are also progressing for Deddington and Shipton on Cherwell and Thrupp. The Local Plan Review will need to have regard to the policies in these neighbourhood plans.