2. THE LOCAL PLAN AREA

2.1 THE PEOPLE

2.1.1 The 1991 Census showed a total population of 59,251; in 1997 the figure was estimated to be approximately 60,000 and by 2001 the Census indicated an overall rise to about 63,012. The three main towns of Penzance/ Newlyn, St. Ives and Hayle, together with their respective parishes, account for about half of the District's total. The remainder of the population is spread throughout the area, most notably in St. Just, Pendine, Goldsithney, Marazion, Madron, St. Erth, Connor Downs, St. Buryan, Ludgvan and Crowlas.

2.1.2 Following growth in the 1970s and 1980s the population continued to rise during the 1990s. The increase in population has largely been maintained by inward migration with Penwith proving a favoured location for those seeking retirement homes or a better quality of life. This trend is unlikely to change and, while migrants include those of working age, the present imbalance in the age structure, between people of working and non-working ages, is perpetuated as the young leave the area to seek training and employment and older age groups continue to find the District attractive.

2.1.3 The attractiveness of the District to inward migrants and those seeking second homes has led to competition in the housing market with resultant prices that are beyond the reach of many of those employed locally on lower incomes. This has highlighted the need to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing available to meet the requirements of those unable to compete in the local housing market.

2.2 THE PLACE

2.2.1 Penwith contains a unique blend of natural and man-made environments that is locally revered, nationally recognised and internationally acclaimed. Within a matter of miles the landscape can vary from plunging cliffs and rising remote moors which appear unchanged for centuries to rolling agricultural vistas and wooded valleys where the mark of human activity is clear. However, more than a cursory investigation will reveal that, even in the most lonely corners of the District, prehistoric monuments dot the landscape, in fact, as many as anywhere in Europe. The District is also renowned for its many significant areas of nature conservation value including a variety of important habitats, wildlife, marine life and geology.

2.2.2 The towns and villages are as varied as the countryside, ranging from the tightly built cottages and narrow streets of St. Ives and Mousehole to the elegant terraces of Penzance and the traditional churchtowns such as St. Buryan, Gulval and St. Hilary. The settlements contain a variety of interesting and important buildings the diversity of which adds further to the quality of the built environment.

2.2.3 In many areas the intrinsic strength of character of the District has proved capable of withstanding the adverse impact of the late twentieth century 'development' and 'improvement' trends, particularly when complemented by carefully applied planning controls. There are, however, clear examples of the deleterious effect of unsympathetic developments to be found throughout the District. Poorly maintained, older buildings of charm and character stand side by side with mediocre modern solutions. Non-traditional materials, windows
and roofs of seemingly endless variety mar entire streets and brash shopfronts and signs punctuate many frontages. In the countryside rural lanes are spoiled by access ‘improvements’ and hedge removal and poorly executed conversions of agricultural buildings dot the landscape. At worst the overall effect is one of poster paint daubed carelessly over a delicate water colour.

2.2.4 The effect of planning decisions is cumulative and it is often difficult to identify at what point the inexorable ‘development pressures’ which themselves constantly vary, brought about a fundamental change in any one area. It is a process of erosion which in many cases is not necessarily indicative of a local failing but is attributable to the inadequacies of the level of control through national legislation.

2.2.5 Penwith represents a rare and valuable combination of an outstanding rural and coastal landscape, delightful towns and villages and a wealth of sites which are of historical, archaeological and ecological importance. This heritage has been and continues to be under threat and it requires a high degree of protection and management together with measures for enhancement if it is to be fully appreciated and not lost or further damaged. It is the need to safeguard the very special characteristics of the area, while at the same time endeavoring to achieve economic prosperity and ensuring that the needs of the residents for housing, employment, recreation and other potentially conflicting uses are met, which constitutes the greatest challenge to the planning process.

2.3 THE ECONOMY

2.3.1 There can be little doubt that the economy of the area suffered considerably during the periods of recession experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s. Each slump in the economy brought its round of closures and redundancies and, while there have been some successes, the periods of buoyancy and optimism have been too brief to stimulate strong, sustained growth.

2.3.2 The problems faced by the local economy are further compounded by the District's location at the western end of a long narrow County with all the consequent problems of communications which in turn have made it difficult to attract and retain new manufacturing industry. Nevertheless industrial sites have been developed by both the private and public sectors in the Penzance, St. Ives and Hayle areas. The take up of sites on these estates has varied and frequently there has been pressure to accommodate other inappropriate uses which do not make the best use of expensive serviced land. However, there is a shortage of available land for the provision of new workspace, both in and outside towns.

2.3.3 The economy is characterised by a large number of small firms with a high proportion of self-employed workers and there are less people than nationally employed in the manufacturing sector. Within the rural areas considerable support has been given to new and expanding small firms through government agencies and the Council will continue to work in partnership with the private sector and other relevant bodies to provide further much needed stimulus to the economy.

2.3.4 While in the past the production of tin and copper was an important part of the local economy the closure of Geevor Mine brought mining to an end and the extraction of stone is now limited to the operations at Castle-an-Dinas Quarry; although there is sand extraction activity at Gwithian, and Penlee Quarry at Newlyn could reopen if market conditions were favourable. Agriculture has also
declined as an employer and changes in the agricultural industry are likely to lead to further contraction. Farm incomes are often insufficient to sustain the level of capital investment and many farmers are seeking ways of diversifying their activities by utilising redundant buildings for other uses, including rural industry, and by undertaking tourism and leisure related developments. Among the indigenous industries fishing alone has experienced some prosperity in recent years and Newlyn has continued to support a large fleet with a very high value of landings. However, increasing regulation of the industry and conservation measures have resulted in a reduction in the number of vessels operating from the port, and there are increasing uncertainties and pressures on the industry.

2.3.5 Tourism is a significant element of the local economy with the population of the area dramatically increasing at the peak of the season. However, increasing competition from cheap foreign holidays, and the uncertainties of the British climate, has caused a decline in the popularity of the area as a tourist destination. While tourism is an important source of income to the area there are particular employment problems associated with the industry namely its predominantly seasonal nature and relatively low pay.

2.3.6 Unemployment in Penwith displays distinct seasonal variations as a result of reliance on the tourist industry and is above the national average. High levels of unemployment, combined with poor wages, lead to a generally low level of prosperity and as identified earlier, certain aspects of life in the area serve to highlight this, such as the inability of local people to compete in a housing market that is inflated through pressure from inward migration, second home buyers and the loss of properties to holiday lets.

2.4 COMMUNICATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

2.4.1 Located as it is at the far end of Cornwall the District has benefited from improvements to the trunk road network serving the County. However, the District is still relatively remote, in terms of journey times, from the main centres of the country. In this context continued upgrading of the A.30 Trunk road, particularly the Goss Moor diversion, is important. Within the District the period from the mid 1970s has seen significant improvements to the road network through the construction of the Hayle, Marazion and Long Rock Bypasses and the Penzance Distributor Road. The roads serving some rural areas are narrow with consequent problems of congestion and while there is a continuing programme of improvements undertaken by the highway authority with the aim of alleviating these localised difficulties, it is important that such schemes do not detract from the rural nature of these roads.

2.4.2 Penzance is the focal point of the local transport network and it is also the main crossover point for passenger and freight traffic to the Isles of Scilly, both by air and sea. Within the town facilities for rail, coach and sea travel are in close proximity, with the addition of a direct bus link from the station to the Heliport for travellers to the Isles of Scilly. This proximity is advantageous, particularly for visitors, in that a convenient interchange of services can be achieved. Long-term parking facilities for visitors to the Isles of Scilly are also close at hand in the Harbour Car Park and in privately operated long-stay parks.

2.4.3 Port facilities are available at Penzance, Newlyn, Hayle and St. Ives catering for a range of commercial, leisure and tourism related interests. The fishing industry is particularly important locally and, while a number of boats operate from each of the harbours, Newlyn is the main focus of activity.
2.4.4 There is an all-year round helicopter service from Penzance to the Isles of Scilly and fixed wing flights to the Islands and destinations outside the county are available from Land's End Aerodrome. The aerodrome is also a valuable facility for visiting light aircraft.

2.4.5 A network of local bus services is provided by a number of operators. While many of these services are suitable for journeys both to and from work and school, on some rural routes services are at a low level, particularly during the winter timetable period. Penzance is the terminus of the main high speed rail link to Paddington and other cross-country routes and as such is of strategic importance to West Cornwall as a whole. There are main line stations at Hayle and St. Erth, and St. Ives is served by a branch line from the latter. The continued existence of the main line rail link is seen as essential to the economic well-being of West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. In addition there is a link between enhanced and affordable rail services and the ability to reduce car use. In this respect the St. Ives Branchline is also important.

2.4.6 Until the mid 1990s the District suffered from a lack of adequate sewage treatment and disposal facilities. In many cases settlements were served by outfalls where raw sewage was discharged into the sea, often in close proximity to bathing beaches. The construction of a major Regional Sewerage Scheme involving the treatment of sewage from the Penzance, St. Ives and Hayle areas at St. Erth and its subsequent discharge through a new long sea-outfall at Gwithian alleviated most of the previous problems. More localised issues remain to be addressed in some areas.