Sustainable Development

Responding to the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework
How well is its emphasis reflected in our local Core Strategy?

The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises the need for sustainability in growth. What does this mean?:

Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations.

This is echoed throughout the framework in each of the major roles which planning is seen to perform for the economy, for society and for the environment

The Wealden District (Incorporating Part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy as formulated seems to rely on an alternative definition of sustainability, valid in so far as it goes?: keep doing things in the same way and hope that it works out for the next few years at least ..

Rather than seeking to build a robust locally capable, community based, low carbon infrastructure in which resources are, as much as possible, provided and used locally, this strategy seems engineered to continue to supply residents in vulnerable and ecofragile ways with remotely sourced goods and services they have forgotten how to provide for themselves ..
The presumption seems to be that concentrating housing in a few, mainly urban, locations will make them easier to supply with all they need, including food, services and transport. There is some sense in that .. if we continue to be a consuming and wastemaking society with boundless cheap resources to draw upon and holes to fill, air & water to spoil. But maybe real long term sustainability and care for those who come after us (as well as those who live with us now) could actually be far better fostered by encouraging capability building and local resourcefulness?

The basic premise that development should not (generally) be allowed in neighbourhood centres and other unclassified settlements mitigates against the sustainability for which we are being encouraged to aim. These are the very places which are most appropriate for the establishment and nurture of sustainable communities, able to provide for themselves or from local sources: food, energy and appropriate employment without having to import so much from further afield. Expanding already large centres increases their need for a greater transport and logistical infrastructure to bring in all those things which they are unable to make, grow or recycle for themselves and renders the whole structure even more fragile and more susceptible to disruption; as well as being ecologically, socially and from a health and welfare point of view .. .. unhelpful.

People have skills, people want to work, people want to care ... and they are good at it! people need food, shelter, fulfilment, care ... much of which could be found in our own communities and drawn on gently ... as we consider our global responsibility to use less, to haul less, to meet more. Are there better ways of living, of sharing, of being, of consuming? Can we, in our privileged part of the world, take a lead in learning and applying these skills?

So ... 'sustainability' is not just getting all the goods, services and stuff to people in the most cost-effective way .. unless 'cost' somehow fully takes into account the real long-term ongoing drain on

and risk to people and the environment .. Development and growth is more than just pushing on in the same old way, however attractively packaged; it is allowing for and even encouraging careful, thought through change; which may well mean encouraging far more growth in widespread down to earth, practically rooted neighbourhood communities.

Perhaps a Core Strategy summary might read something like this?: Development should be encouraged in those places and communities in which the heart can shine and people learn to support one another, using carefully the resources which are available to them, whether that be in town or countryside, without an overreliance upon the State or on such a continual supply of imported goods and services ... .
It might be harder to administer? but produce far better long-term results.

This is not isolationist or luddite; on the contrary, it is wanting to be careful and using only our share and realising that we have to work together, using the best available technology and resources, to do it.

Peter Gunner